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# fantastic ADVENTURES

## the SWORD and the POOL

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

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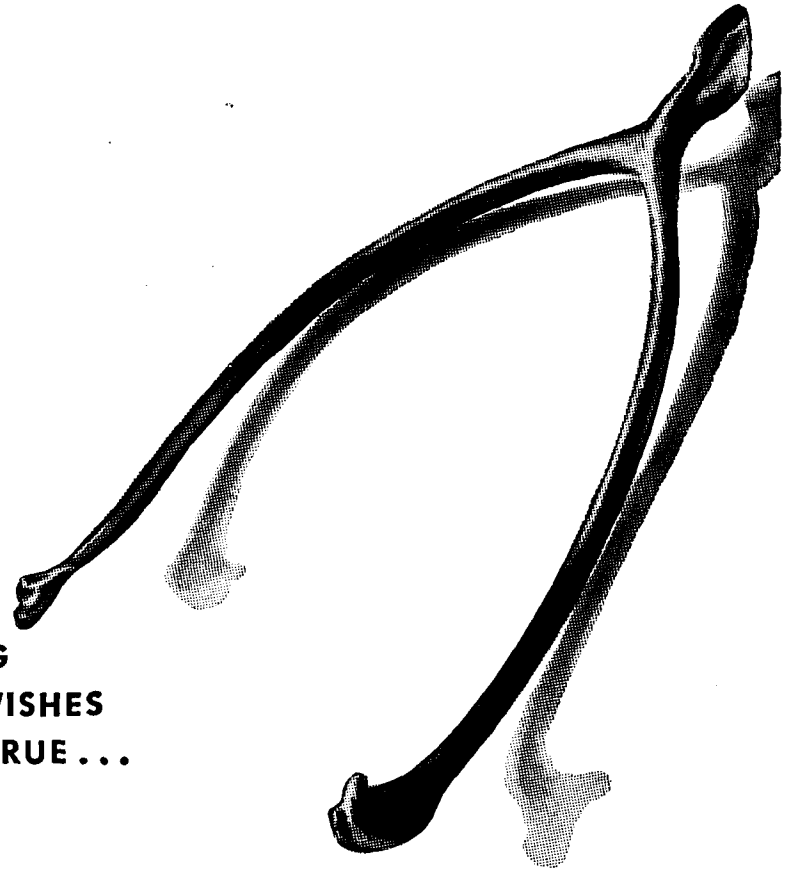

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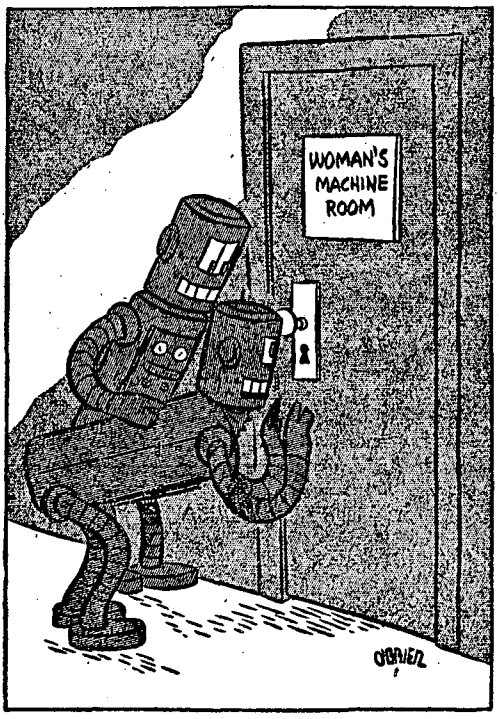
# Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

DON WILCOX, who has written perhaps some of the best modern "fairy tales," and received hundreds of letters from readers acclaiming them, has done it again. At long last he's written another delightful novelet called "The Land of Big Blue Apples." Here's one, you fantasy-loving mothers, that you can read to your children! And while you're reading it, you can revel in that old "back to my childhood" feeling. It'll actually make you feel young again. And that's something, these days!

THIS month we've stolen a march on the top-ranking slicks of the country. We're publishing something that we believe to be one of the finest fantasy yarns we've ever read. It's a short story called "An Adam From The Sixth" and it's written by an author who has scored the biggest and swiftest sensation ever recorded in the fantasy field. His name is Richard S. Shaver, and those of you who read our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories*, know what a furor his "cave" stories have caused. This fantasy has nothing to do with caves, but contains some of the bitterest, yet most convincing and basically true satire we've seen in this type fiction. It will leave you at the end with a huge lead weight in the pit of your stomach. Mr. Shaver will be back to the pages of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in the future, we hope. And we think you'll be the ones who insist that he continue writing this type of fiction.




DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN'S remaining manuscripts can be counted on the fingers of one hand now, and "Christopher Crissom's Cravat" is one of those last few. You'll delight in reading this gem of a story, and you'll pay tribute to a fine writer as you read it.

OUR cover story this month (cover by McCauley featuring his beloved Mac Girl) is done by Berkeley Livingston. It's "The Sword And The Pool" and it's got that touch of adventure that provides just the right counter-balance for Mr. Shaver's story.

H. B. HICKEY makes his bow to readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES with "Finished By Hand" which is one of those ghastly little stories that leave you with the cold shudders. It's very well done, and we welcome a new writer to the fold who promises much for the future.

CHESTER S. GEIER (who just recently became the father of a bouncing baby girl—we know because Chet insists he spends hours bouncing her to keep her from crying) has penned another good one in "A Crystal And A Spell." We won't do more than mention the story, but we'll add that Chet is just about the most adoring and proud papa in the world, and he goes around with a silly look on his pan that just can't be beat. If his stories from now on ramble into nurseries with little singing cherubs, don't be a bit surprised. We'll be surprised if they don't!

OUR assistant (he'll hate that word!) editor, Howard Browne, just recently flew to New York to begin lining up more good fiction writers for us, anticipating the end of the paper shortage which has been causing us so much uncertainty lately and is the reason for the delay in the appearance of your favorite magazine. He writes back, saying "Boy, have I got what you want!" Well, even if he hasn't, we've got a file full of some of the finest fantasy written in the past four years. Next issue we have some nice surprises for you. Don't miss it.

*Rap*



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REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

## All STORIES Complete

THE LAND OF BIG BLUE APPLES
(Novelet—39,000) ..... by Don Wilcox ..... 6
Illustrated by Rod Ruth

*In this country you ate apples—and you caught them on your horns. Saved trouble picking them up.*

CHRISTOPHER CRISSOM'S CRAVAT
(Novelet—14,400) ..... by David Wright O'Brien 70
Illustrated by Enoch Sharp

*It was a lovely tie—if you had an eye for color. And this one demanded that it be noticed . . .*

AN ADAM FROM THE SIXTH
(Short—5,700) ..... by Richard S. Shaver ... 96
Illustrated by Malcolm Smith

*Adam hung himself in despair; then he got another chance to live, all memory of the past erased.*

A CRYSTAL AND A SPELL (Short—5,700) .. by Chester S. Geier .... 108
Illustrated by J. Allen St. John

*There was magic in the crystal; it could cast spells. But a piece of gas pipe complicated things.*

THE SWORD AND THE POOL
(Novelet—27,000) ..... by Berkeley Livingston .. 120
Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

*Out of the pool came a pair of hands bearing aloft a shining beauty of a sword dedicated to freedom.*

FINISHED BY HAND (Short—3,500) ..... by H. B. Hickey ..... 166
Illustrated by Malcolm Smith

*Never throw stones if you live in a glass house; and also, never yell thief if you are one too!*

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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "The Sword and the Pool."
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, illustrating "Stories of the Stars."


MAY 1946

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 2




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Her fascinated eyes were fixed on those horns advancing to impale her . . .



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# THE LAND OF BIG BLUE APPLES

## By DON WILCOX

"TO THE most attractive drum majorette that ever twirled a baton—"

Joe Banker reached for the silver loving cup.

"—in behalf of the Chamber of Commerce of the City of Bellrap—"

His short arms swung in a full gesture toward the main street crowd.

"—I do present this token of our highest esteem. Take a bow, Miss Londeen!"

She didn't take a bow. But she smiled as only Donna Londeen could smile, and little Joe Banker thought, "What a dame, what a dame! Wait tell she finds my note in the cup."

Her shapely pink hands (six-fingered

The horns were handy to catch falling apples—but they could be put to other uses . . .



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hands, Joe noted for the first time) embraced the loving cup. This was the climax of the Bellrap City Festival, and the main street crowd gave with a mighty cheer. Bellrap City—where everyone knew everyone—and yet here was a stranger walking off with the honors.

*Who was Donna Londeen?*

The newspapers had referred to her as the niece of Uncle Jim Keller who owned a small chicken farm at the edge of town. She had been staying with Mr. and Mrs. Keller for several weeks, the papers said. But this was the first time she had been seen in public. She had been taking "twirling" lessons in private, to compete in today's drum majorette contest.

"What a dame!" Joe Banker wasn't the only young bachelor who sighed for a date with her. But he considered that his chances were better than anyone else's. He was the master of ceremonies today. He was the city clerk every day. He was handsome. He was a dynamo of energy and good nature.

Furthermore, he was, now and then, original—and that goes a long way with any girl. Who but Joe Banker would think of putting a note in the loving cup? He could hardly wait till she read it. It contained a very important question.

"She's not so tall, after all," Joe thought. He was consoling himself. He happened to be the shortest man in the male quartet that sang at Sunday night concerts and Friday night box suppers. The shortest, the handsomest, and unquestionably the most aggressive.

Donna Londeen wasn't so tall. It was the two-foot blue fur shako she wore on her head that made her look tall. Also the high blue fur epaulets.

Whoever saw such a striking uniform, with proud epaulets built up to a height of ten or twelve inches over each shoulder?

Whoever saw such an interesting face, with such bright purple eyes and such dangerous curves of eyebrows? Dangerous curves of lips, too. And if one's eyes strayed beyond the beauty of her face, as Joe's did, there were still other dangerous curves.

"One moment, Miss Londeen, don't go 'way," Joe sang into the mike in his rich tenor. "Would you be so kind as to remove your shako? . . . Oh, I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to make you blush, but if you would please remove your hat—"

"I'd rather not, Mr. Banker."

WHAT an accent! Joe had listened to the soft coo of Southern girls of many and varied accents that time he had gone down to New Orleans to the Mardi Gras. But never had he heard any weird twisting of sounds to match this. He persisted:

"The judges are curious to know, Miss Londeen, whether the winner is a blonde, a brunette, or a red-head. If you'll kindly remove your shako and take a deep bow—"

She shook her head, now blushing violently.

So she wanted to play coy, thought Joe. He began to mock her. She shook her head, *no*. He shook his head, *yes*. And the crowd loved it, and cheered and shouted. "Stay with her, Joe!" "Knock it off!"

Playfully Joe gave her high blut hat a push. Her blushing, smiling face went white with anger. As the shako toppled, it revealed her oddly colored hair. But that wasn't what amazed Joe and several hundred spectators.

*She had horns!*

Extending up through her thick lush hair was a pinkish white horn rooted right above her left ear. Another grew from the top of her head. And a third

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from the right side of her head, just above her right ear.

The unbalanced shako clung to the points of the horns. She grabbed for it, jerked it down over her forehead. She thrust the loving cup back into Joe's hands. She whirled and ran to the edge of the stage.

"Wait! Come back!" Joe started after her. "I'm sorry, Miss Londeen. Come back . . . Help me, some one."

She bounded off the stage, to run through the thinnest ranks of the crowd. A policeman made a pass at her.

"Carry on, Mayor," Joe shouted back at Mayor Smith. "I'll—"

He gestured with the loving cup. He had goods to deliver. He sprang from the stage to the street and ran into the crowd.

For a moment it looked as if the policeman had stopped her. (Though he later remarked, "If she wanted to run away, I guess she had a right to, and I figure it wasn't too dignified of Joe Banker to run after her that way, the darned wolf.")

The policeman seized her by the shoulder, gently but firmly. He gripped the high shoulders of the uniform, where the epaulets were built up to a height of ten or twelve inches. She tore out of his hands. The epaulets tore loose, and horns poked through—*two sharp-pointed pinkish white horns growing out of each shoulder!*

She ran like the wind. She covered a shoulder with one hand, held her high hat on with the other. She never looked back at the gaping crowd. She missed seeing the shame-faced policeman, who glared at his scratched and bleeding hands, muttering, "Darn, she's got sharp shoulders!"

She ran out of the crowd and into a drug store.

She ran back to a side door that led into a hotel lobby.

Joe whirled through the drug store entrance and called to her as she disappeared beyond. He dashed the length of the room, collided with a waiter and turned a tray of refreshments into an ice cream geyser, with the waiter underneath.

He bounded into the hotel lobby. His high-hatted quarry ducked into the adjoining telegraph office. He followed. He was gaining on her. Two more bounds and he would overtake her.

But he dropped the folded paper from the loving cup. He dodged back to recover it. The employees in the telegraph office stared at him. One of them said sarcastically, *"Mr.* Banker, what *is* the matter with you? *Lose something?"*

"Not yet," Joe snapped back. He strode out the front door, looked both ways, saw Donna Londeen jumping into a taxi half a block down the street.

There was no other taxi. At once a number of excited persons gathered around him, hounding him with questions.

"Did she get away?" "Who on earth is she?" "Was she a blonde or a brunette, Joe?"

"By George, I didn't notice—*that,*" said Joe. "Or did I?"

"It was purple!"

"Purple!" Joe echoed. "By George, it was, I remember."

"What are ya gonna do with the cup, Joe?"

"By George and by Joe, I'm gonna *deliver* it."

## CHAPTER II

AT THE edge of town the old barn stood black against the moonlit sky. Joe could hear the voices again, old Uncle Keller's and his wife's, and then that sweet weird voice of Donna Londeen. They were helping her carry

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her baggage out to the barn—of all places.

"She must have a car in there," Joe thought, "or a plane."

But when they opened the doors and switched on a dim ceiling light, he saw that it was some sort of rocket ship. It was a slender, cigar-shaped craft, almost as long as the 75-foot barn. It was bright yellow, decorated with a straight row of blue apples painted along the side from nose to tail. Joe slipped along the fence for a better view. What a craft!

"The blue apple rocket boat," he said to himself. "Now where could that have come from? Where on earth do they grow blue apples?"

Where *on earth?* He reflected that he should perhaps take in more territory. A space ship—a beautiful girl with six-fingered hands, purple hair, and seven pinkish-white horns growing out of her head and shoulders—what did it all add up to?

"By George and by Joe," he said breathlessly. "She's about to take off. Wherever she came from, she's heading for home, bag and baggage."

He looked up into the vast moonlit sky and wondered how it felt to leap through it in a rocket ship. What a thrill that must be.

Old Jim Keller was loading the luggage in the ship. Mrs. Keller was kissing Donna Londeen good-bye and making a sob scene out of it. Donna, magnificent in a glittering space suit and a fan-shaped head-dress that adorned her horns and flowed down over her shoulders, was talking sweetly, telling the Kellers how grateful she was for all the hospitality.

"I wish I could come back some day," she said. "But I mustn't promise. One never knows."

"You forgot something, D o n n a," Mrs. Keller said. "You were going to call the lady who gave you the twirling lessons and tell her good-bye."

"Do you think I dare?" said Donna. "I've heard that the parade officials have been looking for me. I wouldn't want them to find out—"

She and Mrs. Keller hurried back to the house to make the call.

Joe looked at the sky, at the ship, at the silver loving cup in his hand. He muttered darkly to himself, "I told the boys I'd deliver this prize . . . Hmm."

He took a notebook from his pocket and scribbled a message:

"Mr. and Mrs. Keller. Please tell the boys at the city hall I'll be back as soon as I deliver a loving cup. I'll keep an account of my expenses and and present a bill to the city when I return. I can't state in advance whether this errand will take me to Africa, the North Pole, or the Moon, but I promise to deliver. In the meantime, tell the boys to carry on.—Joe Banker."

HE SPRINTED across the potato patch to the mailbox at the corner. He wrapped the note around a rock, fastened it with a rubber band, and dropped it in the box. He sprinted back to the barn.

He heard the screen door of the house close. They would be coming back. He had no time to lose. If only Jim Keller didn't block his way . . . Ah, the passage seemed to be clear.

Under the dim light in the ceiling of what had once been a dairy barn, he slipped along the walk back of the stanchions. For a moment he had to set the loving cup down while he climbed over a gate. The yellow gleam of the brightly colored ship excited him. The oval-shaped door was open. He darted through the row of stanchions, over the feed rack, and into the ship.

He hes ated for a moment at the long aisle offering a narrow passage

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either to the right or the left. The floor was pleasantly soft to his dusty shoes, the sleek lines of red light along the ceiling a few inches above his head were a delight to his eyes.

"Who'd have thought it?" he mumbled in awe. "And all this hunk of wonderland hidden away in Jim Keller's barn—oh-oh!"

"Who's there?" Jim Keller barked.

Joe had taken five steps to the right, away from the ship's control cabin, and there stood Keller, straightening up from packing the last box, tall and skinny in his overalls and brown woolen shirt. He looked both fierce and scared, his bright little eyes blazing under brownish-red beetle brows. He dropped the rope he had been using on the boxes and gave an angry puff at his corncob pipe.

He came at Joe, snarling. His duty was plain. He must bounce this intruder before the ship took off.

"Out! Git out! *Git!*"

"Not so fast, Uncle." Joe didn't want a clash of fists, but he saw to it that his hands were free for any emergency. He had laid the silver loving cup somewhere. "I'm here on city business. I've come to deliver—"

"I know all about it. I was in the crowd when you made your speech, grinnin' like an ape every time you looked at the winner. Well, you had your chance then. But you had to git smart and knock her hat off and let everyone see she had horns."

"But I didn't know—"

"All right, git off. This boat don't need a city clerk—nulp!"

Uncle Keller choked off as Joe caught him over the mouth. "Pardon me, Uncle, I don't want to hurt you. But you've got to quiet down and listen to me."

For a moment Uncle Keller tried to twist out of Joe's grip. But the struggle endangered his precious corncob pipe, so he relaxed. "All right, I won't holler," he whispered. "What's your game?"

Joe, releasing him, decided to risk a confidence.

"I'm going with this ship. I don't know where it's going, but *I'm going.*"

"That's a rash thing to do, young man. Have you thought it over? . . . S-s-sh. Here they come back. She's all set to take off. In about twenty seconds. You'd better—"

"I'm hiding right here. And don't you say a word." Joe dived into the mass of soft packing among the light luggage. "See that you keep a straight face on the way out."

The voices were just outside the airlocks now. Donna repeated her goodbye to Mrs. Keller. She called goodbye to Mr. Keller, and was a bit puzzled that she received no answer.

"He must have gone on about his chores," said Mrs. Keller. "He hates goodbyes."

This puzzled Joe. From his hiding place he could see Uncle Keller still standing there in the aisle staring at his corncob pipe, scowling.

Donna could be heard stepping into the ship. A switch snapped, hydraulic levers swished, the airlocks were closing.

"You'd better get out, Uncle," Joe whispered. "She's closing up."

Uncle Keller looked down at him. "Move over," he said. "We're on our way to Mars."

## CHAPTER III

THE shock of taking off began with a roar of rocket motors. For just a split second Joe thought, "Oh-oh, the whole town will come out to see what exploded. They'll hear that I'm off for Mars, to deliver a silver—"

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*WHAMMMMMMM!*

When Joe Banker woke up, several hours later, he looked up into the pretty face of Donna Londeen. She was bandaging his left wrist. Her smile was disturbing.

"Think he'll live?" Uncle Keller asked between puffs on his corncob pipe.

"His eyes are open," Donna said in her sweet, weird voice. "But I think he knows not a thing. He is so dizzy."

"I know everything," Joe growled. "What's the meaning of all these bandages? Where am I?"

"In my rocket ship. You took a nasty jolt, both of you."

"Didn't bother me none," said Uncle Keller. "I'm tough. But these city clerks—"

"Don't worry about me," said Joe. He was fascinated by Donna's purple hair that cascaded over her shoulders among the horns.

"Didn't bother me none," Uncle Keller repeated, " 'cept for breakin' my pipe stem. But I always carry an extry."

"You mischief boys, playing stowaway," Donna teased. "Why not tell me you want to go to my planet? I am delighted to bring home two living souvenirs."

"I'm no souvenir," said Uncle Keller. "I'm a free citizen and a Democrat."

"That'll cut a lot of ice with the Martians," Joe said sarcastically.

"Two souvenirs," Donna laughed, looking out into the blackness of space. Was she planning to sell her trophies over a bargain counter when she got home? "Two live ones—one short and one tall—"

"Who's short?" Joe Banker barked. "Just because Uncle Keller happens to be built like a bean pole—"

"One tough one," Donna continued, "and one tender—"

"Who's tender, darn it?" Joe growled. "Not me . . . Ouch! Easy on that wrist, lady."

The blackness of space was everywhere outside the ship. The earth and the moon had been left far behind. The motors hummed so evenly you forgot you were moving at high speed.

Gradually the sun shifted. The bright dot of Mars, nearly straight ahead, grew larger.

THE beautiful girl with the seven horns and the purple hair spent her hours at the controls. She was studying languages, between times, and was not to be bothered.

Sometimes she gave Joe and Uncle Keller lessons in her own native tongue. It was surprisingly like English, a fact which fascinated Joe. She urged them to study from her books. They would go obediently to the observation nook at the rear of the ship and work for awhile. But soon they would fall to talking.

"What on earth are you smoking, Uncle Keller?" Joe asked, looking up from his book.

"Paper. And it don't taste healthy. But I been clean outa smokin' for two hours."

"Well, don't start burning the ship down."

"This was somethin' in your handwritin'—somethin' I found on the floor."

Joe searched his pockets. "H-m-m. I know. Darn it, you're burning up the note that I wrote to Donna asking her for a date."

"That's what it smokes like." Uncle Keller gave a sour puff.

"Well, anyway I got my date without the note. Mars—think of it! I've got a hunch she likes me, Uncle."

"Maybe so, for a souvenir."

"I fell at first sight, or did I tell you

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you that before?"

"Fifteen times. You're goofy, Joe. When you saw her horns you shoulda chased the other way."

Joe didn't like the way Uncle Keller was throwing cold water. He got up and paced the floor, annoyed.

"Let me ask you. What did you and your missus do when she first arrived and asked to stay with you "

Uncle Keller tapped his pipe and frowned. "To be right honest, we took a fancy to her the minute we laid eyes on her. The horns was stickin' up in plain sight, but the way she had her fancy hair ornaments and veils all woven around, it sorta took your breath.

"The fust thing Mom whispered was 'Goodness, ain't she perty!"

"There you are!" said Joe.

"But fallin' in love with her—well, I tell you, son, it won't work."

The space ship rocketed on through the black mysterious sky, and the two men fell silent.

Little does a guy realize, when he gets that feeling that he'd follow a gal anywhere in the world, how much travel he may be bargaining for. Or how much adventure.

Mars loomed up like a great white moon. Donna Londeen shared a meal of synthetic foods with her two passengers. Then she returned to the controls.

Keller at six of the little food cubes with great relish. Joe warned him, "Concentrated stuff, Uncle. She said each cube equals two blue apples. You've eaten twelve apples."

"Blue apples? Never heard of 'em. Maybe they're small, like plums."

"Maybe they're large," said Joe "Cast your eyes at the plastic icebox down the aisle."

Uncle Keller's eyes widened. The icebox specimen was as large as a grapefruit. It was a soft-skinned fruit, deep blue.

"Twelve?" Uncle Keller put a hand to his midsection. "Confidentially, Joe, I've got a stomach-ache."

THEY landed on Mars in the darkness, a little before the dawn of a Martian day.

A half hour before they swooped down upon the planet's vast, shadowy surface, Donna gave a little curtain lecture.

She was much too attractive, Joe thought. Her horns were brightly polished. Her lovely purple hair fell in waves over her bare shoulders. She wore an abbreviated sport costume that would have attracted attention on a tennis court or a bathing beach. The red and white striped flowing gauntlets that hung from her wrists matched her striped, high-heeled pumps.

"You are not souvenirs to be sold over the counter. You are free men as long as you behave yourselves. But do not tell anyone I have a space ship." She was deadly serious. "It was a gift from someone on another planet. Hardly anyone knows I have it. My people are not interested in the languages of other planets. They would not approve of space ships. That is why I land in the dark."

Joe and Uncle Keller stared at each other. They had imagined her people to be a race of planet-hopping scientists.

"Scientists? No, you will find my race of Martians rather primitive."

They sailed down into a world of dark tree tops. It looked as if the branches would reach up and scrape the hide off the ship. . . . Zwinnng! . . . Zwinnng! . . . Zwinnng! . . . The counter motors had been retarding their speed for the past hour or more But these last moments were the dizziest. Uncle Keller, still regretting his

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twelve-apple dinner, fell into Joe's arms.

"So you're tough, are you?" Joe muttered.

"I need a smoke," Keller replied weakly.

"If she smashes into those trees we'll all smoke."

Within two miles of the wide, silvery river, the bluff of a hill loomed. The slope was bare of trees for the space of a hundred yards. Donna landed the ship neatly. There was a grating sound. Zwinng!! . . . Zwinnnng . . . Zwuppp! It came to a stop.

Donna looked at her passengers. "How many are still alive?"

"Just one," said Joe. "Poor old Uncle just now died in my arms."

"I ain't dead," groaned Uncle Keller. "I only need a smoke."

Donna operated a lever to throw a beam of light along the crest of the hill. A wide concealed door in the sloping ground folded open. Rows of green lights revealed a deep cavern hangar.

"Don't remember anything you see, my friends," said Donna. "This is my little secret."

The ship eased into the hangar.

"There are two things worrying me," said Joe. "First, how are you going to account for your absence?"

"I shall say I was Up North," said Donna.

"What's up north?"

"In the Apple Forest Nobody knows. Nobody asks. When you say Up North, with a capital U and a capital N, that is where anyone has been when he does not wish to tell. What is your other worry?"

"How are you going to explain *us?*"

"That is not easy," said Donna. "To be safe, I must hide you . . . Here we are. Are you ready to step out?"

"Step out?" said Joe grinning. "I've come thousands of miles just to step out with you. But poor Uncle, I think he passed out . . . Didn't you, Uncle Keller?"

"I been Up North," said Uncle Keller.

They gathered up a few things in the haste and confusion and lightheadedness of arriving on a new planet. Uncle Keller took his loop of rope but shook his head when Joe offered to fill his pockets with food cubes. Joe couldn't think where he had put the silver loving cup. He decided he would come back for it later. Just now he was eager to bound outside.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARS!

Mars! The light gravity made Joe feel as weightless as popcorn in the popper. It was exciting to run out on the hillside and try out his new legs.

"Come this way, Joe. You and Uncle mustn't be seen."

Gray dawn was over the land. Donna led the way through the forest of black tree trunks. The sweet air was exhilarating. Joe simply had to run. He bounded like a deer over every root or log or clump of grass. When they came to a ravine, he picked Donna up in his arms and leaped across with her. He felt much too good. He'd bet he could jump over that ravine backwards.

"Just watch me!" His foot slipped on a fallen apple, and he sat down in the mud.

"Do it again," Donna laughed. "Uncle Keller did not see you."

Joe got up, rubbing his hip. "It's a thrill to set foot on Martian soil, as the saying goes. . . . Coming, Uncle Keller?"

"I hear animals," said Keller, pausing with a hand to his ear. "It sounded like an elephant steppin' in the mud."

"Me," said Joe.

"Naw, this was somethin' else. Hear

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that kerthump? There's another one. . . . By crackies, I hear 'em from all directions."

"You are in the land of falling apples," said Donna. "They ripen and fall constantly. In Mars there is no finer food."

"Don't mention food," Uncle Keller put a hand to his stomach.

"The river bluff is just ahead. There I will hide you in a cave above the village . . . Are you coming, Uncle?"

Ker-thump!

Uncle Keller wasn't coming. A big blue apple had smacked him on the back of the head and knocked him down.

"What a peaceful expression," said Joe. "See his lips puff. He's dreaming he's having a smoke."

"Quick, Joe. Someone is coming. Can you carry him? We must make a run for it."

## CHAPTER V

DONNA caught Joe's hand and almost jerked him off his feet. He ran back with her and gathered up Uncle Keller, who still sat on the ground, muttering at the apple that had struck him.

"Come! Hide!" Donna exclaimed. "We should not be seen here."

The three of them dodged behind a large cool tree trunk. The Martian who had sauntered into view came nearer. It was the celebrated chef, Ruffledeen. Donna knew him well.

"He prepares the finest foods in the forest," she whispered. "I wonder why he is here . . . Look."

Ruffledeen picked up a fallen apple and threw it toward a treetop. He repeated this act. Was he trying to hit that *orange* apple?

Each tree, as Donna had explained, had one orange apple near the top. *Orange apples were poison.* Usually they did not fall, except during wind or rain storms.

"By George, he's trying to bring down that poison one," Joe whispered.

"S-s-sh."

Ruffledeen came closer, trying for the orange apples of nearer trees. He did not know he was being observed.

He was dressed in short, puffy pantaloons and a workman's yellow jacket. He was eight horned. (Joe realized at once that he preferred seven horns, because of Donna). He looked like a walking picket fence. Joe was impressed by his lumpy whiskers which resembled a bunch of purple grapes.

As he sauntered closer, a blue apple fell. One of his horns caught it neatly. Now Joe realized for the first time that *people who live in the land of falling apples need horns.*

He reached up and removed it, took a bite or two, and threw it away.

Then suddenly he looked in their direction and his purple eyebrows jumped at the sight of Uncle Keller, who failed to pull his neck in.

He came over, then, and it was a strained greeting. He stared at Joe and Uncle Keller. He was embarrassed, it was plain. So was Donna. She made a gesture toward her two companions. She spoke in her Martian tongue, most of which Joe understood.

"Ruffledeen, I will ask you to say nothing about my hornless friends."

"I will say nothing." Ruffledeen's eyes shifted toward a treetop and back to Donna. "You will say nothing."

HE WALKED away. Donna looked after him wonderingly. Between them a temporary bargain of silence had been sealed. Yet neither knew what the other was up to.

"We must hurry on," she said to Joe. "At the hangar I received a message from my sister. One of my friends de-

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sires to see me at once."

"A friend with horns, I suppose," Joe said, growing warm at the temples.

"No." Donna hesitated, uncertain whether to confide. "It is my scientist friend from Venus."

"Oh, that bird from Venus!" Joe Banker was stung with jealousy. She seemed fond of mentioning him.

Along the rocky bluff was a small cave, not easily seen from the slope below. Between it and the river were the unpainted mound-shaped wooden structures that comprised the village.

"In this cave you two will be comfortable until I return," Donna said. . . . "You will like it here—I hope."

Then she left them, bewildered and stung, and hurried away.

A few hours later a gruesome event took place in this part of the Martian forest. A Martian girl was killed. And by a twist of fate, Joe Banker was involved. It was a cruel ordeal for a newcomer to this land.

Before it happened, Joe was beginning to like Mars. In their cave he and Uncle Keller made themselves comfortable. They first had the trouble of chasing a *naggie* out. The *naggies,* as Donna had told them, were the chief animals of this region, slow moving sheep-like beasts, as sure-footed as any mountain goats.

"Don't smell like a goat, though," Uncle Keller observed. "Don't smell bad, in fact."

Uncle had slapped the naggie's mane and caught a handful of loose white wool. With a burst of inspiration, he packed the wool in his pipe, lit it, and began to smoke. A peaceful smile spread over his face.

"By crackies, better'n the best tobacco I ever tasted."

Then he laid down the pipe and dashed out of the cave.

"Gotta find that goat, Joe," he called back. "Gotta lay in a supply of smokin'."

JOE laughed. Lazily he stretched out on the cave floor to watch the forest village. People were out under the trees, gathering food, working with tools, or tending children. He had brought binoculars from the ship. Whenever he saw a pretty girl he thought, "Maybe that's Donna's sister."

Everyone had horns—six, seven, or more—occasionally as many as ten or twelve. Often the horns were loaded with fallen apples. People carried them with no more concern than Joe carried chewing gum in his pocket. When a person grew hungry, the food was there.

Uncle Keller came back with his overall pockets full of naggie wool. He tossed two blue apples to Joe.

"I'm still off my feed. What do they taste like?"

"Yummie! Not like apples or food cubes. They're more like a swiss steak and sweet potatoes and all the trimmings. From now on I'm on a blue apple diet."

From somewhere down the valley a long, weird scream sounded.

"Yee-eek!"

It was the terrorized voice of a girl. She was approaching the village on a dead run. A gang of boys were after her, shouting wildly.

She ran straight into the village of mound-shaped houses. The swift-footed lads were right on her heels. She dodged from one row of buildings to another. She bumped into a child as she rounded one corner. The child fell, crying, and the mother came to the open door in time to see the wild chase.

"Yee-eek!" the girl cried. She leaped over an outdoor fireplace, she hurdled a pile of dead timbers, she almost ran into two of the boys. They dived to-

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ward her, heads down, their sharp-pointed horns aimed with deadly intent. She sprang like a deer and cleared them.

Now she cut a straight course along the foot of the cliff. She passed beneath the cave, and Joe saw her wild, panicky expression. Her purple hair was streaming like flames around her horns.

Against the vertical barrier of rock, she was surrounded. Eight of the young huskies gathered in a semicircle, moved toward her slowly. They bent their heads forward, so that their horns became a trap of deadly spears, closing in.

Her back was against the wall. She looked for a chance to leap out of the circle. But the other seven youths outside, held their heads high. Whichever way she might leap, they would catch her on their horns.

They meant to kill her. Joe was convinced. He glanced toward the village. Housewives and laborers were running out to see the excitement.

"Stay out of it!" Uncle Keller warned.

"How can I?" Joe snatched up the coil of rope. "She might be Donna's sister!"

He clambered to the upper edge of the rocky cliff. He tied a slipknot in the rope as he ran. He reached a jutting stone straight above the point where the girl was trapped.

He hooked a foot under a root, leaned forward almost farther than he dared. They were right below him, about twenty-five feet down. The girl wasn't screaming, now. She was stricken silent with terror.

The gang of eight closed in, bending for the kill. Their deadly horns were within seven feet—six feet—five—and they sprang!

Joe's loop of rope fell true, over the girl's head and shoulders, to tighten around her waist.

He hoisted. His new strength against the light Martian gravity was in his favor. He drew up. She screamed like mad. Her pursuers straightened. Who was this hornless man spoiling their game?

"A demon!" they cried in Martian. "A hornless one!"

The villagers, coming on the run, shouted and swore. Did they want to see her killed?

Joe hesitated. For a moment she hung high in the air, eighteen or twenty feet above her pursuers.

Then she took her fate in her own hand. With a violent twist of her head she slashed at the rope that held her. The central horn of her head was sharp like a knife blade.

She slashed with insane fury. She severed the rope and fell.

Joe, frozen with amazement, watched her descend.

"The horns!" he gasped.

She fell on them—three sets of sharp-pointed horns on the heads of three boys. Their pink tips speared clean through her body. She hung there and her scream died away.

Then their Martian shout broke out afresh. "A demon! A hornless one!"

## CHAPTER VI

"QUICK, Uncle! We've gotta get out!"

Joe's shout was superfluous. Uncle Keller had seen everything. He had already snatched the binoculars. Now he grabbed the rope that Joe was about to discard, and joined Joe in flight.

With Martian gravity to help and any number of horned Martians to inspire them, they ran six times faster than the best dash record of Bellrap, U. S. A.

They headed eastward, toward that

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part of the forest where they had originally landed. For several minutes they couldn't tell whether they were being pursued. They were above the long winding ledge, the Martians were below it. At every break along the way Joe expected to see dozens of horned men surging through to the upper level.

But, happily, his expectations were were not fulfilled.

Thirty minutes later, in a deep, sheltered recess among the rocks, they stopped to catch their breath. They were not being followed, after all.

*Why not?*

Before they could catch their breath to talk it over they were frozen into silence by the sound of voices from somewhere beyond.

"Martian hangmen, most likely," said Uncle Keller. He was scared white. Not that he considered Joe guilty of man-slaughter in the recent ordeal. The girl had caused her own death, of course. But when people shout, "Demon!" in a strange country you don't feel like waiting around to argue your innocence.

"Hs-s-sh! There they are. By George! They're hornless!"

Joe stared. The two men dressed in tan work clothes, were lazying in the sunshine on a table rock, halfway down the cliff, near a slow-burning fire. It was plain that they knew nothing of the recent incident of the girl, and cared less. They might have been camping here for days.

One of them was lying on his back, looking up at the steamy clouds with a contented, if somewhat evil, countenance. His face reminded Joe of a rabbit. The other, a huge tousled man with scarred hands, was leaning on one elbow, idly polishing something that looked like a Martian horn. Joe could have tossed a pebble between the two men.

"Come away," Uncle Keller whispered.

"They might be Americans. Listen! They're speaking English—sort of."

"Come away. You're already up to your ears in trouble."

Joe knew that. But he couldn't help staring.

"I don't like their faces," Uncle Keller whispered.

"I don't like their accent," said Joe. "It's like nothing I ever heard before.

"And they *don't* have horns."

UNCLE KELLER was becoming acclimated to the way of the Apple Forest, Joe observed. He was already more suspicious of persons who didn't have horns than persons who did.

"I suppose you're even suspicious of us," said Joe sarcastically.

"Dern right. We're outsiders. We got no business bein' here. Much less, fallin' in love with perty girls, or messin' with savage murder parties."

A ground squirrel, skipping along the top of the ledge, caused a small pebble to drop. It struck the iron kettle on the fire. Ping!

The tousled man with the scarred hands sprang up, thrusting the horn inside his shirt, and grabbed a small black pistol from his pocket. His eyes combed the cliff.

He growled, "I thought you was keepin' watch."

"I am," said the rabbit faced one. "Put your artillery away."

Joe, watching every move, was still too much confused by his own recent scare to analyze what was going on here. But Uncle Keller, more wary than ever, saw no good in these hornless men.

"I told you they was mischief makers," Uncle Keller whispered. "Men don't jump and grab their guns unless they're expectin' trouble."

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"But they do have horns!" Joe exclaimed under his breath. *"Removable horns.* See, over there by the wall."

THERE were three sets of head and shoulder harnesses. The single horn which Scar Hands was polishing had been removed from one of these sets. From the tan color of each harness, and its head-and-shoulder-shaped contour, it was easy to guess that a set was to be worn as a deception. A hornless man thus might appear to be a native.

"Let's stick around," said Joe. "I want to see what these phonies are up to."

"Three sets of horns and only two men," said Uncle Keller. "Maybe they carry a spare."

For the next hour Joe was torn between two courses of action. He wanted to steal down the cliff for better eavesdropping. He wanted to scout back to the cave to see if Donna had returned. But neither seemed safe, and Uncle Keller persuaded him to stay in his present hiding place.

Together they got one big earful. There was to be a festival soon. The people were only waiting for the popular Donna Londeen to return from some mysterious visit "Up North."

They needed her approval—and her Uncle's—before they gave the new young judge from "Up North" the authority to preside in this region.

Part of this discussion was carried on in such quiet voices that Joe couldn't hear. Then, too, there were numerous mysterious allusions. The big man would speak in the Apple Forest language part of the time. Joe could understand a part of this. He had studied it on the ship and had caught its similarities to English.

The men fell into a dispute over the laws. Donna Londeen was involved. One declared that she could be required to choose a husband at the Festival. The other said she couldn't. They finally agreed that it depended on whether her uncle, Londeenoko, ran the festival or someone else.

"Anyway," said Rabbit Face, "She will choose, this time. The people are gonna force her into it. She's been runnin' off to other lands and they're afraid they'll lose her."

"I look for a fight if she does choose," said Scar Hands. "These Horn Folks ain't gonna like her choice."

That remark shot through Joe like ice.

Hours later, with a new daylight dawning over the Apple Forest, Joe was in deep turmoil.

He and Uncle Keller had slipped back to their cave above the village, and he had slept—but feverishly.

"I'm in a devil of a stew," he admitted. "I follow a girl through thousands of miles of space. Then she hides me here and walks off and forgets me. And now—"

"Now you're actin' like a chicken with its head off."

"Now I hear that she's got to choose a husband, and I know darned well who it will be."

"Who?"

"That Venus Scientist she's always talking about."

"How do you know?"

"From what those yeggs said yesterday. They said the people aren't going to like her choice. That means she's going to choose someone without horns. That must mean him."

"Too bad," said Uncle Keller. 'She ought to choose someone with horns."

Joe whirled angrily. "But *I* don't have horns."

"You figure she oughta choose you?"

"I didn't come to Mars for the joy-ride."

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"Hmm." Uncle Keller puffed at his wool-filled pipe. "If you married her, what do you figure your children would look like?"

"Do you have to bring that up?" Joe snarled.

"Can't you just see those youngsters of yours goin' to school an' knockin' the other kids down with their horns and scarin' the teacher into the corner?"

"Shut up."

"An' when they git into high school they could play football. They'd be perty good at that—if they didn't ram into the goal post."

"Stop it!" Joe shouted.

"All right, you get sensible," said Uncle Keller. "You and she are two different breeds of humans, an' if you start mixin' up its gonna get complicated."

Joe slept some more, and dreamt.

When he awoke, Donna Londeen stood before him.

## CHAPTER VII

"HELLO, Mr. Earth Man," said Donna, smiling. Her face was radiant, catching the pink sunlight. The flowing silky gauntlets rustled at her wrists as she reached her hand out to him. But he didn't notice.

"Am I dreaming?" he said, coming slowly to his feet.

"You were sleeping very soundly," said Donna. "I hated to disturb you, but I have only a few minutes to talk to you."

He was conscious that his hair was tousled and his clothes were unpressed from being slept in. Hotel accomodations in this cave were nothing to brag about. Here was his chance to complain to the management.

"You don't by any chance have a cave with hot and cold running water and a mattress, do you?"

At a small pool of water among the rocks near the cave entrance, he washed. She watched him as he combed his blonde hair.

"The Earth Man is good to look at," she said. "Does he ever smile? . . . What is the matter, Joe?"

Again she offered her hand to him. This time he took it, and they walked back to the cave together.

"Where did Uncle Keller go?" he asked.

"Out to get more naggie wool for his pipe. He is such a funny creature. When I lived at his house on the Earth, he and his wife were very friendly to me. They were the first Earth people I ever knew and they taught me so much. I will always like Earth people when I think of them."

They sat down together. Joe avoided her smiling eyes.

"I didn't think you liked Earth people," he said. "I thought you preferred Venus people."

"You are in a very strange mood," said Donna. "Is it because your cave does not have a barber shop and a swimming pool? After I have gone you may walk to the river and have a swim. Then you will feel better."

"I don't dare. I can't cross the village without being seen."

"Today there is no one in the village," said Donna. "Everyone has gone to the Festival, three miles down the river."

"Festival!" Joe perked up. "That's my chance to present the cup—oh-oh!" He stopped, crestfallen. The Festival of the Horn Folk! That would be the occasion those two yeggs were talking about, where Donna would be forced to choose her husband.

"What is the matter, Joe?" She placed a hand on his shoulder.

He turned toward, clutched her bare shoulders with a savage impulse that he thought was jealousy. He wanted to

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crush her. Then he was kissing her; and for a long moment his head swam with the pleasure of knowing her lips, of finding their answer to his own. She did not draw away from him, and when he looked into her eyes, her pretty face was serious.

"I'm crazy about you, Donna," he whispered tensely. "I've been half mad about you since the first time I saw you. You must have known. That's why I couldn't let you get away from me. That's why I came here . . . Say something, Donna. Don't just stare at me that way."

HE WAS holding her close. As if in answer to his words, she bowed her head slowly against his chest. The three horns of her head brushed gently across his face. She bowed deeper until the sharp points stroked under his chin, to press against his throat.

*Was that her answer to his feverish declaration of love?*

She moved away from him slowly. She rose to stand like a goddess, her majestic head high, her firm breasts outlined within the close fitting stripes of her brief costume.

"After the Festival is over," she said softly, "I may be able to take you and Uncle Keller back to your homes. I cannot promise now. It depends."

It depends! Joe breathed hard. So she did not know whom she would marry! Or did she mean that she and her future husband were undecided whether to go to the Earth on their honeymoon?

"I assume," she added, "that you *will* want to go back soon?"

He looked at her sharply. Had she already heard of his ill-fated effort to rescue the screaming girl?

She took her leave again, to hurry away to the Festival. He called to Uncle Keller. This time they would not stay and wait. They would follow!

The festival grounds were under tall trees, well spaced, with trimmed trunks. The wide arm of branches formed a high ceiling of lush green foliage.

Joe and Uncle Keller followed a winding ravine to avoid the crowds.

"I never figured you'd dare walk this close to danger," said Uncle Keller. "What did she say when you told her about the girl and the rope?"

"I never told her," Joe admitted. "It's something I want to forget. Do you think it'll fly back in my face the first time I meet someone?"

"I think Donna would have warned you to skip the country."

"That's what I was afraid of," said Joe. "And I don't want to miss the Festival. Especially if she *chooses*."

"Ugh. I hope you ain't got any ideas."

"I just want to see what the bird looks like that can walk off with her."

THE very young boys with half developed horns were chasing around an arena, warming up for this game. Through a thicket Joe and Uncle Keller could see the whole arena.

The judge was there, on an elevated platform built between tree trunks. He and Londeenoko stood glaring at each other, snarling.

The judge had come to run the festival, and Londeenoko challenged his right to do it.

Their quarrel drew a crowd. Everyone in Donna's village knew that Londeenoko, a thick, crusty sharp mustached old gentleman with seven reddish horns, was bombastic enough to knock the young judge off the stage if he didn't like the way things went.

But the young judge was a stubborn number. He had the greater advantage. The office of judge carried great esteem.

Mobar wore the customary green face paint and a bold-striped judge's robe.

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His judgely dignity and charm captivated many. Although he was a newcomer among their people, having come from "Up North," he seemed well on his way to being accepted as their new leader.

The former judge had been Donna's late father. His administration of justice had won great popularity. Now his surviving brother, Londeenoko, was reluctant to accept this young upstart, Mobar, as a worthy successor.

"Give him a chance," people kept shouting from the crowd.

Londeenoko was at last forced to bow to pressure. He was the father of nineteen children, the grandfather of an uncounted number of grandchildren. This tribe knew how to band together against the crusty old man's will. It had become their habit to consider, as a matter of course, that he was in the wrong whenever he got into an argument.

"I concede the power to Mobar," Londeenoko called out at last. "Never before have we accepted a judge from Up North. But I refuse to be accused of being so prejudiced in favor of my brother that I cannot accept another judge. Let us give Mobar a chance."

The crowd cheered with a weird, half laughing, "Yo-yo-yo-yo!"

Then the two men on the elevated platform gave the sign of friendship. Each in turn bowed to the other, touching his sharp horns against the other's chest *gently*, thus proving that all feeling of malice were set aside.

It was Mobar's turn to speak. Joe, watching from his hiding place, could not read the young judge's expression. The squares of green paint over that dignitary's face were a part of his official protection.

"I wish to honor the brother of the late judge." With his robed arm he made a gracious gesture toward Londeenoko. "I hereby appoint him my assistant, and ask him to take over the the active management of this Festival."

IT WAS a clever stroke, almost sly in its psychological effect. Londeenoko took a deep proud breath and held his head high. His tribal relatives who had just thrown him overboard in favor of this newcomer could see, now, that he was still a big and important man. He would remain on the stage to run the Festival.

"If at any time you need any assistance in making decisions," the young judge added in his precise Martian tongue, "my judgement is at your service."

This took a little wind out of Londeenoko's sails. But he gave a gruff laugh to treat it as a joke.

Then a messenger arrived with a call for the judge to come elsewhere. The judge frowned as the message was whispered to him. He bowed to the crowd and excused himself.

"I shall leave you temporarily," he said. "A matter beyond the next village requires my attention."

Joe, watching everything through the thicket, went tense. "Did you hear that, Uncle?"

"I heard, but I didn't get it. What's up?"

"I'm not dead certain, but I think they're on our trail."

"On account of that girl you didn't rescue," Uncle Keller grunted. "I dunno what we've got ourselves into, but I figure that act of kindness is gonna cost us."

Donna had joined the crowd, and wherever she went people greeted her and told her they had missed her. They wished her father could still be here, running the show as he used to do. And some of them would say, "I am sure you will make your choice this season."

"Do not be too sure," Donna would

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answer.

"Oh, but you must. The young men are impatient to know who it will be. Have you decided?"

"Wait and see."

"It will be some handsome man with ten or twelve horns, let us hope."

"Wait and see." Then smiling with embarassment, she would hurry away from them.

Once Joe heard someone ask her if it might not be the new judge. She seemed a bit startled.

"I do not believe he would enter the contest," she said.

"And if he does?"

"Please do not ask me to think of any other judge except my own father," she said. "Come, let us watch the games."

There were all kinds of contests involving apple-throwing and naggie-chasing. The small boys fought with their horns, and two clowns, who were really officials, interceded whenever there was a danger of an injury. These clowns wore false faces representing naggies.

Between the games they kept the crowd laughing. One of them turned a flip-flop and landed on his head, or rather, his horns—so that he stuck in the ground. He kicked like an animal in a trap. The other clown ran circles around shouting for the crowd to come and help. Then with a nimble handspring the stranded clown whirled to his feet.

Before the feast, the young men chose partners. For this event the girls gathered in the center of the arena, and their heroes took turns throwing apples at the group. A tall handsome ten-horned swain wound up like a baseball pitcher. When he let fly with the blue apple, several of the girls bent forward to try to catch it on their horns. He had lots of girl friends.

The bashful boy could hardly be persuaded to take his turn. He tried deliberately to miss the whole group. But when the apple fell on the horns of the most beautiful girl, he flushed with pleasure as the spectators cheered.

IT WAS during the feast that the exciting announcement was called out by Londeenoko.

"The big event will take place immediately after the feast. Ten young ladies will enter the choosing ceremony."

Joe and Uncle Keller could see the many faces that turned to Donna. Everyone wondered whether she would be one of the ten. Soon they guessed the answer. Her pretty little sister carried a message to Londeenoko, and when he looked across to her and smiled, everyone knew that he had won his point. Donna would enter the choosing ceremony.

"I'll see you later," Joe whispered as he ducked away.

"Where you goin'?"

Uncle Keller got no reply. Joe was off on another foot-race—a race against time.

He followed the curve of the river. That was the trail he knew. He took no chance of being seen by anyone who might have remained in the village. If only he could find one of those two men with the artificial horns—Rabbit Face or Scar Hands!

Breathless, he drew up at the hiding place where he and Uncle Keller had listened to the two hornless plotters. Neither of the men was to be seen now. But someone else was there—someone he had not seen before. Luck was with him. This stranger wore a harness over his head and shoulders—an eight-horned harness. So here was the *third* member of the gang who were passing themselves off as native Martians.

The man was hastily dressing in a naggie wool suit. The jersey fitted

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tightly around his neck, hiding the harness that held the horns. Joe had no time to wonder who this man was or what he was planning. Ten swift bounds brought Joe to the ledge overhanging the shelf on which the man was working. For a moment Joe waited, the loop of rope ready. If the fellow would just step this way a trifle—there!

The rope fell true—over the arms and down to the ankles. Joe yanked up on it like a fisherman with the biggest catch of his life. The fellow whirled off his feet, strung up by the noose.

It was but the work of a moment to secure the rope to a small tree, and the captive was left dangling a few feet above the shelf.

"Gollies, he's the best inter-planetary cusser I ever heard," Joe thought. He raced down over the rocks to the shelf. He worked under the handicap of flying fists, and a broadcast of profanity. It was a supreme achievement for Joe to hold his own tongue during this operation, but he didn't want this mystery man to know that he spoke English.

"My friends will tie a stone to you and throw you in the river," the fellow threatened.

He must have repeated the threat in several languages, Joe guessed. His snarling voice still echoed in Joe's ears two minutes later as Joe raced away. But the friends had not appeared, and the fellow was left hanging by his feet.

Most important of all, Joe now wore a handsome set of horns.

"By George and by Joe, I'm a native Martian," he said to himself.

## CHAPTER VIII

SEVEN candidates for the hand of the hand of the beautiful Donna Londeen stood in line under a tall and graceful blue apple tree and one of them was Joe Banker, the city clerk of Bellrap, U. S. A.

Two of the candidates were broad-shouldered twelve-horned men—husky young giants with three horns on each shoulder and six over their heads.

The tallest of all the candidates was a dark-skinned boyish fellow with eleven horns. He wore a yellow jersey and long naggie-wool trousers. Beside him Joe must have looked very short. But Joe chose to stand next to him, heedless of the jibes, for a very definite reason. Joe, too, was wearing a jersey.

A close-fitting jersey with a high neck had been necessary as a covering for the harness over any deceiver's head and shoulders. It was well enough for Martians who grew their own horns to strut around with naked chests and shoulders. But if one is obliged to conceal straps across the chest and under the armpits, a borrowed naggie-wool jersey is a convenience.

Even so, Joe knew that he was in great danger of being discovered. The tall fellow looked down on his head. And while the band which curved over his skull had been camouflaged with patches of hair between horns, that hair did not match his own. It matched the black hair of the man who had been left dangling by his feet from a rope.

"What is the delay?" one of the candidates asked. "Where are the officials?"

"They were called to the ravine by someone who saw a demon," said the tall eleven-horned fellow.

"A demon?" Joe gulped. "What kind of demon?"

"A hornless one," said Axloff, the tall boyish fellow. "He may be the one who participated in the recent killing of a 'naggie' girl."

Joe swallowed hard. What did this mean? Had they caught Uncle Keller? Surely he would never stick his neck out of yonder thicket to be seen.

"He was a hornless demon who blows

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smoke," Axloff continued. "They discovered him in the thicket setting fire to a tube in his mouth!"

"The corncob pipe!"

Joe blurted the words in English before he could catch himself. Axloff looked at him strangely. "What did you say?"

The chills raced through Joe's spine. His first impulse was to break and run.

"Stay in line, my friend," Axloff snapped at him.

But a moment later the word passed around that the demon with the fire in his mouth had been struck to the ground by the powerful Londeenoko.

"They've beaten Uncle Keller!" Joe thought. "They've struck him. And where was I? Out chasing down a pair of horns so I can compete for Donna—when anyone knows that I haven't a chance. I'm a heel!"

He started to edge away from the line of candidates.

Axloff caught him by the arm. "Come back in line, my friend."

"I'll come back soon," said Joe. He tried to pull away from the tall fellow.

"Stand where you are—unless you want to deal the cruelest insult to Donna."

"What do you mean?" Joe asked.

"Have you forgotten the code of the choosing ceremony? We men walk forth in this arena—Why? Because we hope to win this girl. Here we stand in a line. If one of us should change his mind and walk away, to her it is a slap to be remembered for life."

JOE stood tense, looking up at Axloff. These words of counsel were sound. He was angry at himself for what he had almost done. He would stand fast. For now he realized how much Donna meant to him. For the present Uncle Keller would have to fight his own battle.

Then the further report came. To some extent it subdued his wrought-up feelings.

"The beautiful Donna interceded for the demon," came the news, to be relayed from mouth to mouth through the throngs. "She asked Londeenoko to have him imprisoned in the dry well. After the Festival is over, they will call him to account."

"On with the Festival!" the crowd began to clamor. "On with the Festival!"

The seven candidates were made to parade twice around the arena. They were fair game for the spectators, who cheered for their favorites and shouted all manner of insults at the others.

"Who it that little short one in the naggie-wool garments?" they would yell. "He must have grown up on orange-colored apples. Where did he come from?"

On the second march around the crowd, Joe became the target for so many jibes that he wondered whether they guessed he was an imposter. A general yell had spread along the line, particularly among the younger boys.

"Where did little eight-horns come from?"

The tall angular eleven-horned candidate, Axloff, stopped to glare at some of these hecklers. He shouted back an answer in defense of Joe.

"Little eight-horns came from Up North. Any complaints?"

He bent his head forward so that his eleven horns pointed straight toward the loudest of them.

The effect was gratifying. Joe heard no more heckling.

"Thank you, Axloff," Joe said in Martian. "If Donna should not choose me, I hope she will choose you."

"She could do worse," said Axloff. His remark earned a series of stony glares from the others. Especially from the two husky twelve-horns. They had frowned on any signs of fraternizing

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within this line of rivals.

Donna walked slowly to the center of the arena. She was the tenth and last of the girls to choose a husband today. Joe wondered how many of his six companions were left over from the previous events, and how many had waited for this particular choosing.

Above all, Joe wondered what had become of the hornless Venus scientist. Was he here, among these seven? Not unless he, too, was wearing artificial horns. Could it be that this tall, boyish Axloff was the Venus man? Hardly. His horns were too convincing. His diction, too, was precise Martian.

AT THE sound of the weird musical notes from wooden pipes—the official signal for each event—beautiful Donna Londeen walked slowly toward the candidates. You could hear the low whispering of the spectators. They watched every move as she extended her greeting of friendship to each of seven men.

She bowed to each, barely touching the horns of her head to their chests. When she came to Joe, the last in line, she gave a surprised gasp.

"*You?* But how—?"

She glanced quickly at the barely perceptible outlines of the harness that curved over his head. She suppressed a smile as her sharp eyes caught the patchwork effect of his hair.

"Thank you for coming," she whispered. "But you must not be disappointed . . . if . . . when . . . but, thank you."

There was no time to clarify her message. No time for him to ask about Uncle Keller. The other six candidates were waiting impatiently for her to address them. The two husky twelve-horns exchanged suspicious nudges.

She stood before the seven of them, extending her six-fingered hands in a gracious gesture of appreciation. Her eyes avoided Joe as she spoke.

"My very great thanks to each of you for engaging in this contest. I shall become the wife of the one among you who wins. I wish to each of you good luck."

She started away. She glanced back, as if uncertain whether everyone was there that she had expected. She crossed the arena to the elevated platform.

"The Venus man!" Joe thought. "I'll bet a thousand dollars I left him hanging, head down, from the cliff. If she knew, she would never forgive me."

In that moment Joe felt the arrows of conscience as never before. This was dead wrong, for him to steal his way into the ranks. If her heart had gone to someone else, what business did he have to be here? Her whole life depended upon the choice of this hour.

"Do not stand there dreaming," Axloff called back at him. "March with us."

Joe marched as if in a trance. Never in his life had he felt such an emotion of deliberate guilt. He looked at Donna, standing there on the high platform beside her Uncle. He tried to guess her thoughts.

"I've got to take these horns back!" he said to himself. "I've got to let that Venus guy have his chance."

That was all he could think about for the next several minutes.

HE FOLLOWED the line of candidates through a routine of difficult feats. At Donna's order he took his turn at lifting weights, leaping over hurdles, turning handsprings and *horn*-springs. The harness on his head and shoulders held firm. Apparently no one suspected his horns were not his own.

Through one contest after another

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he held his own. But his thoughts were elsewhere. All the time he kept asking himself questions.

Could he be sure that the hanging man *was* the Venus scientist? What other hornless persons might there be in this land besides Uncle Keller and himself? And the mysterious rabbit-faced man and the man with the scarred hands? And the man hanging over the cliff, who may or may not have been their friend?

Donna had not told much of her escapades to other planets. Now, as Joe recalled her chance remarks, he could bring to mind only two acquaintances of hers from lands beyond Mars.

One of these was the Martian scientist, who had first interested her in other worlds and had made her a gift of his space ship while he carried on his research and experiments here on Mars. He was the one she mentioned most often.

The other was an adventurer of Mercury, who had taken a fancy to her while she was there, and had once followed her all the way back to Mars in his own ship. She had barely mentioned him. Joe did not know whether he was here now, or on Mercury.

Both of these men were, according to his impressions, hornless human creatures more or less related to Earth man—for this breed had undoubtedly found its way around the planets at some time in the historical past.

Casually, Donna had mentioned three or four different Martian friends, favorites of her uncle, Londeenoko. Two of these, Joe guessed, were the twelve-horned men now leading the line of contestants in a tightly fought apple throwing contest.

"Your turn, Axloff," one of them said. "Beat my record if you can."

Axloff weighed three apples in his hand. He was allowed three trials. The platform was about thirty yards away, and there Donna stood, waiting, her head bent forward. Her horns were the target.

Three apples now hung on her shoulder horns. None of the contestants had succeeded in hanging one on her head horns. The center horn carried the highest score.

AXLOFF hurled an apple. It missed. The twelve-horns gave a low laugh. Axloff wound up for his second trial and let fly.

The apple caught squarely on the left horn of her head. The crowd cheered.

Axloff's third and last trial! The apple flew to the right horn of her head and barely hung there. The crowd went wild. The twelve-horned men muttered sarcasms as Axloff retired to the line.

"Your turn, little Eight Horn," said Axloff. "Good luck."

Joe winked and clicked his tongue. He had been the pitcher for the South Side Wildcats in his day. He stepped up, weighed three big blue apples in his hand, rolled two of them to the ground, and whammed out with the third.

It was straight and fast, but high. Donna waited, motionless. It sailed over the point of the middle horn, barely grazing it. Donna's purple hair waved with the wind. Her head moved a trifle, and the last apple that Axloff had hung on her head fell off and bounced from the platform in two halves.

Crusty old Londeenoko's eyebrows jumped. He was agitated over the way these contests were going. He had already shown a definite preference for one of the twelve-horned huskies.

He marched across to her from the farther side of the platform, lifted his heavy hand and barked a sharp warning.

"But I did not mean to move, Uncle,"

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Donna replied.

"Do not let it happen again," he growled.

Donna stood motionless, her head bowed, waiting. Joe's second shot came, as straight as an arrow. It struck the central horn squarely. It hung to the crest of her head as if it had grown there.

The crowd burst into a panic of cheering, and Joe caught an enthusiastic slap on his back. Axloff's.

"You will win on that one, friend! Throw away your third shot!"

But old Londeenoko didn't like it. Again he came thudding across the platform, his sashes fluttering. No one could hear the warning he called to Donna. But a moment later everyone heard him bellow like a wounded bull. Joe's third apple went wild and caught him in the solar plexus.

## CHAPTER IX

EVERYONE thought that "Little Eight-Horn from Up North" had won.

But Londeenoko had other ideas. He waved his arms for silence. In a thunderous voice he proclaimed, "Foul! Foul!"

Arguments insued among officials and spectators. Londeenoko's nineteen sons and daughters and their numerous children protested that grandpa was playing favorites. The young judge, they declared, would have to come back and settle the arguments. Someone was dispatched to find him.

Others, including Axloff, declared that the rules provided for emergencies such as these. It would be necessary only to devise additional contests of skill or daring to determine which of the leading contenders should win.

"The *leading* contenders!" one of the twelve-horns echoed sarcastically. "I suppose that lets us out."

And while the quarrels mounted in fury, Joe slipped away unnoticed, to do what he thought was the only honest thing to do: Give the Venus scientist a chance to take his place.

It was a hard, exhausting run, coming on top of all the strenuous games. Steaming with perspiration, Joe clambered up the trail he had previously followed along the top of the cliff. Before he reached the village he saw three men coming in his direction along the trail below.

Of the three, only one was obviously hornless. But on closer approach, Joe knew that none of these men possessed horns of his own. The three were the non-Martians that Joe had come to know as Rabbit Face, Scar Hands, and "Black Hair."

It was Black Hair whom Joe had left hanging. It was Black Hair's head and shoulder harness that now supplied Joe with his eight horns. It was those black patches of hair now adorning his own blonde head between horns that had worried him all through the contests.

Joe stopped, breathing hard, waiting for them to come within earshot.

He grew feverish at the thought of what he was about to do. It was a bitter pill—to consede that this black-haired man whose horns he wore, must be the Venus scientist in love with Donna. It was doubly bitter because Rabbit Face and Scar Hands were his companion.

"Three tough yeggs," Joe thought. "I wish I wasn't so darned honest."

But the flash of disappointment which he thought he had once seen in Donna's face when she surveyed the seven candidates drove him to go through with his plan.

"Hi, down there," he yelled over the cliff to the path below.

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THE three men stopped abruptly and looked up.

"There is the man!" Black Hair exclaimed. "Those are my horns. That is my garment."

"I want to explain—" Joe's speech was out-shouted by a bellow from Rabbit Face, who started climbing up the face of the cliff like a sure-footed naggie.

"Thief! Come here! You are ours now!"

"Wait. Don't be sore. Let me explain," Joe yelled. "I made a mistake. I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" Black Hair echoed with a sneer. "Off with those horns before my men thrash you!"

"Don't rush me!" Joe warned savagely. "I'll make everything right if you'll listen. Don't rush me!"

His warning failed to impress Rabbit Face, who bounded up over the elevation like a hound after a rabbit. He came straight at Joe—in time to catch a flying fist, kerpop, on the left jaw. He staggered and almost fell over the cliff. Joe caught him by his hair and harness and jerked him back.

"I told you not to rush me." He walked the wobbly rabbit-faced man to a niche where erosion had formed a natural slide of loose earth. There Joe allowed him to roll down to his less ambitious companions. Joe, dusting his hands, repeated, "Sorry, gentlemen, but if you'll let me explain—"

Scar Hands helped Rabbit Face to his feet while their black-haired leader said, "All right. Let us hear what a thief can explain. Talk fast."

"I know who you are, now," said Joe. "I didn't realize when I roped you that you were the Venus scientist. I apologize."

"Huh?" said Black Hair. His two companions gave a questioning look. One of them nudged Black Hair and said, "How did he find out, boss, that you are the Venus scientist?"

Joe sensed their impatience to know what he meant to do about it. He continued.

"As soon as I saw my mistake, I realized that you're the one Donna really loves. She isn't interested in any of the rest of us. *You* should have been in the choosing ceremony instead of me."

Black Hair nodded with a savage sidewise movement of his head. "I agree with you there—Yes, I agree. But—"

"All right, you still have a chance," Joe said. "I'm about to win the contest. I've brought your horns back so you can take my place. It isn't too late. Think what it means to Donna.

JOE started to unstrap the harness. But curiosity caused him to hesitate. The three men went into a powwow of whispers. Joe waited. He sat on a stone at the cliff's edge, looking down on them. Something was in the air. Was it possible that Black Hair didn't want to compete for Donna's hand?

Black Hair looked up and spoke deliberately. "An exceedingly noble gesture, my good man. What is your name?"

"Joe Banker."

"Where are you from?"

"Bellrap, U. S. A., the Earth. I'm the Bellrap City Clerk."

"Hm-m. Inter-planetary exploiters are becoming quite thick around here—Much too thick! Are you in love with Donna Londeen?"

"To put it mildly, I'm nuts about her."

"Do you think the two of you are well matched?"

"Perfectly," said Joe. What was he driving at? Was he going to be noble

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and magnanimous too? "Perfectly—Except—"

"Except for the horns?"

"Yes," said Joe. "If it wasn't for her horns—"

"I have a suggestion, young man. You have recognized me as the scientist from Venus. Let me suggest that a few experiments might prove that these forest folk would be as healthy and happy *without horns*. Have you considered the possibilities of an experiment?"

Joe was all ears. Might there be some simple way out of his difficulty?

"If you are winning the contests," said Black Hair, "the judge and the elders are sure to listen to you. Gather four or five of them together and propose a dehorning experiment."

"Dehorning?" The suggestion struck chills through Joe. It sounded inhumane, somehow. And still, coming from a scientist—

"Dehorn only twenty or thirty at the start," Black Hair continued. "Wait until you see the effects before you decide how and when to dehorn Donna. The judge and the elders will listen to you."

Joe considered. If he could go back and win the final events, would Londeenoko give him a break in the interests of science? As a newcomer to Mars it was impossible to know whether this venture might catch on. But it sounded worth a try.

"This means," said Joe, "that you're willing for me to keep this set of horns until I've put myself across?"

The three men held another brief whispered pow-wow. Then, "All right, Mr. Banker, return them later. We will see that you do. But be sure to sell the dehorning idea. It was your own idea, you know."

"Mine? Did I think of that myself?"

"A very brilliant idea, Mr. Banker. Congratulations."

All the way back to the arena Joe kept relating this conversation to himself, trying to remember just when and how he had originated the dehorning scheme. If he should succeed in putting it over with a bang—if he should start a new fashion in Apple Forest—wouldn't that be one to tell the boys back at Bellrap!

He arrived at the arena just as Donna's candidates were being called together for the announcement of another event.

## CHAPTER X

THIS would be a human whirligig, to be operated by *horn-power*.

"Fortunately we have a prisoner who will serve as the victim for this event," Londeenoko explained. "The competition will be open to the four of you with the highest scores."

"Correction, my dear uncle," said Donna. "The rules say only the two highest shall compete in these additional events."

After another savage argument with his relatives, Londeenoko was forced to bow to the established tradition, though it hurt him to have to leave the two twelve-horned huskies out of the game. They and the other three competitors were now through. The decision lay between Axloff and Joe.

"This game is cruel," Donna said aside to Joe. "There were other alternatives, but Uncle Londeenoko and the officials insisted that a certain prisoner should be punished, the sooner the better. Do you understand what this implies, Joe?"

Not knowing what the human whirligig consisted of, Joe was in the dark. But he had his guess as to who the victim might be.

While the mechanics prepared the

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whirling beams on a horizontal shaft between two trees, the crowd recessed for an hour of feasting. The multitude of horns had collected a multitude of falling apples. For those who preferred more expensive delicacies, Ruffledeen's finest pies and tarts were sold. A corps of boys passed through the crowd with trays, tempting the buyers with the magic name of Ruffledeen.

During this repast, Joe found himself surrounded by three or four elderly men of affairs. Londeenoko himself paid Joe the respect of looking in on this group. A little later the young judge arrived to rejoin the crowd, impressive in his freshly painted green face and stuffy costume.

This was Joe's chance to spring his big idea, to sound out these gentlemen on the subject of dehorning.

"Gentlemen, if a candidate from Up North may be privileged to propose a plan *in the interests of science—*"

Joe paused, trying to read the expressions of the four or five faces around him. The word *science,* had not brought the warm response he had hoped for.

"—I suggest that it would be useful to know what would happen to a growing child—or an adult—*if his horns were to be removed.*"

Cold silence. Everyone was eyeing him. No one responded. He went on:

"A few boys and girls could be dehorned, to begin with. Different methods might be tried. If the experiment has no ill effects, it might become an established practice."

More silence. Glances exchanged. The young judge spoke one sharp word.

*"Why?"*

Joe gulped. Why should horns be removed? When you came right down to it, his only reason was that in case a hornless man wanted to marry a horned girl—

But he didn't dare say this. Already these men were scrutinizing him with suspicious scowls. Somehow the argument didn't sound half as good as before.

"Why?" the young judge repeated sternly. "Why should anyone want to lose his proudest possession?"

Joe floundered. "Well—I only thought—that is, in the interests of *science—*"

THE weird musical notes of the wooden signal tubes sounded, to Joe's immense relief. He backed away from the staring group and hurried along to the elevated platform.

Sure enough. Uncle Keller was there.

Poor Uncle Keller! What would the folks back in Bellrap say if they saw him now? Even his pigs and chickens would hardly recognize him. That prison well must have been full of dried apple dust. His overalls were bluer than ever, and his face and hands were smeared with what might have been blue chalk dust.

If the blue dust had been inflammable, Uncle Keller would have blown up. For again there was a fire burning in the "tube in his mouth."

Indeed, this cob pipe was such an attraction to boys and girls and even grown-ups, that the famous chef, Ruffledeen, seemed to be looking on with envy. Londeenoko was nettled to find himself distracted from the impending event. Those gentle puffs! Those swirling rings of smoke! That fragrance of burning naggie wool.

"I'm outa smokin' again," Uncle Keller said, chiefly for Donna's benefit, for he didn't attempt to speak much Martian. "Down in the well I kept wishin' a naggie would fall in, to keep me company and fill my pipe."

"What are you smoking now?" Donna asked.

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"A bit of naggie wool garment I chopped out of the judge's robe when he wasn't lookin'. When he turns around you'll see. . . . Say, whaddya reckon they're gonna do with me?"

Before answering, Donna glanced at Joe, who was stationed nearby. She put a hand on Uncle Keller's shoulder. The officials and spectators around her were growing angry. What was she saying to this culprit—this spy—this demon who blew fire?

"They will hurt you, Uncle," she said. "There is nothing I can do until the choosing contest is finished. I have already antagonized my uncle Londeenoko. I dare not say any more until I know which man will be my husband."

Uncle Keller's beady little eyes shone fiercely. He looked from Joe to the tall, eleven-horned boyish Axloff.

"You mean it's gonna be one of those two?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"Then can't we fix it so you'll get the tall handsome guy with the horns?"

"He is wonderfully nice," said Donna, "but it is Joe that I love. I have loved him since the day he chased me with the silver loving cup."

Uncle Keller suffered a wobbling of the Adam's apple and his voice sounded strangely sentimental. "Well, then, if it's Joe Banker you love, let's fix it—"

"Poor Uncle!" Donna patted his dusty cheek. "Do you not realize that my fate must now be decided by a *contest of brutality?* Whichever one succeeds in hurting you worse will win me."

Uncle Keller's lips tightened. "Then, by crackies, you see to it that young Joe gives me hell!"

WHEN the second signal notes sounded, Uncle Keller was tied to the end of the sixteen-foot whirligig. It was a crude one-man ferris wheel without seats—a pair of parallel beams fixed to turn on a horizontal axis between tree trunks. Uncle Keller's hands and feet were tied to the crossbar between one end of the beams, a short log was attached to the other end as a crude balancing arrangement.

Uncle Keller was a little heavier than the weight at the other end. Thus, when the whirligig was at rest, he hung straight down. His long bent body, tied up by wrists and ankles, hung limply at a height of seven or eight feet above the ground.

One of the officials took a running jump and struck Uncle Keller with his horns. This caused the whirligig to start spinning, and the lone passenger began a series of most uncomfortable ferris-wheel whirls.

"Pick up my pipe!" he yelled as he raced through the air.

But an official, no respecter of pipes, kicked it off the grounds. That was only the beginning of Uncle Keller's tortures.

"The two candidates will be judged by the energy with which they punish this hornless foreigner," Londeenoko called out to the crowd. Then, evidently realizing that a justification for such cruelty was needed, he added, "Let me remind you that this foreign demon was caught spying on our Festival. We do not know what damage he might do if allowed to go unpunished.

"But are these two candidates patriotic enough to punish him severely? We may well wonder, for one of them is a stranger from Up North, and the other is an outlander from a village below the river.

"You have your instructions, candidates. You may proceed."

Axloff stood back to give Joe the first run. They were to take turns "running under" their vicitm. Joe ran and made a long leap, his horns striking Uncle Kel-

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ler acros the seat of his dusty trousers.

Joe looked back at the blue dust cloud to see Uncle Keller whirling up through a swift arc. As he swung over and down, Axloff ran under him, struck with his horns, and added speed to the whirl.

Around again, and Joe again crashed in, to add impetus. Smack! . . . smack! . . . smack! . . . In a moment the one-man ferris wheel was whirling so fast that it made four or five revolutions to each smack of horns.

The higher the speed, the more perilous the operation. Joe knew that if he ran under a shade too soon, there was danger of inflicting serious wounds.

Smack! . . . smack! . . . smack!

Axloff was trying to be humane about it, too, Joe noted. He was not going to insult Donna by putting on a poor show of energy. But he was trying to strike at an angle that would prevent any serious hooking by the points of his tall, sharp horns.

Some of the noisy spectators called for more brutality. "Tear him up! Spike him in the back!"

IT WAS a horrifying demonstration. At best neither of the candidates could avoid inflicting much torture. Sometimes Joe missed his calculations and knifed at the shoulders or the small of the back. Once Axloff's thrust ripped an overall leg down to the ankle. The victim's clothing was being cut to shreds. Drops of blood began to fly.

"How much can the old man stand?" Axloff said to Joe on the sly as they circled back for another round. And the next time around, "Why do we do it? The judge isn't watching."

Joe saw, then, that Judge Mobar, Londeenoko, and a few other top officials had gone into a huddle, as if to discuss something urgent. What? Could it be the dehorning idea?

While the whirligig went on, the conference of the leaders was swiftly spread into a whispering campaign among the whole crowd. Something was in the air. Some mysterious news was spreading, and as rapidly as the people heard it they turned to stare at Joe.

Now their eyes were following his every move.

Smack! . . . Smack! . . . Smack! . . .

Not an outcry from Uncle Keller. Was the fellow unconscious?

Joe wondered. Should he try to strike harder, to win, to bring this hideous whirligig ordeal to an end? Tilting his horns at the safest angle, again he dashed under.

*Flop!*

His shoulder fastening broke. The harness suddenly went loose over his right shoulder and flopped off the top of his head.

He stopped so abruptly that Uncle Keller almost struck him on the next whirl.

As he grabbed for his loosened horns, he heard Lon Londeenoko's commanding bellow.

"There! Just as I said. Look at him!"

The crowd was gaping. Axloff stopped to gaze. Donna sprang forward from her seat on the platform, put her fingers to her lips. Londeenoko pointed down, and his broad mustached face twitched with anger, gathering breath for a roar.

Above the sound of the whirligig spinning on its axle, the murmurs of amazement from the crowd rose to a sullen thunder.

*"A demon!" "A hornless one!" "Another spy!" "An imposter!" "A foreigner—a hornless foreigner"*

Some half grown boy shrieked, *"He is the one who roped the 'naggie' girl!"*

Then Londeenoko bellowed in a way that welded the whole crowd into a

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dangerous mob.

"He is the one who would have us *cut our horns off.* Yes, my people, that is the very plan he has proposed—to have us *remove our horns!* There he stands! No wonder he has such ideas! He has no horns of his own. He is *a freak—a hornless demon!*"

The crowd spilled out into the arena, drawn by the magnetism of this excitement. Londeenoko, however, motioned them to stay back. With a dramatic whirl, his sashes fluttering, he clapped his six-fingered hands together as a signal.

"Boys! Boys! I want twenty boys!"

At once, forty or more youths came running up from the ranks of the spectators. Joe saw them begin to form a trap of horns, the same circular spear-trap that had gathered around the runaway girl by the cliff.

"Run, Joe!" Donna cried. "It's the *ring of death.* Run for your life!"

## CHAPTER XI

JOE leaped to catch the whirligig. He jerked a horn out of the harness that now dangled over his chest. He used it like a knife. The cords that bound Uncle Keller popped from the strokes of Joe's slashing arm. Poor Uncle Keller fell to the ground—not dead but groggy from pain and loss of blood.

Joe dropped to his feet and gathered the helpless, bleeding friend into his arms. Above the tumult he heard Donna's weird, terrified cry.

"Run, Joe! Run!"

Joe dodged ahead of the circle that was trying to close around him. Two young men raced across to block his escape. With Uncle Keller in his arms, he whirled at one of them, and Uncle Keller's long legs swung out like a baseball bat to knock the fellow flat. With one hand Joe grabbed the next assailant by the horns, jerked him forward, dodging his headlong stagger.

Ten minutes later the two "hornless demons" were out of hearing of the Festival, s l o g g i n g along through a marsh near the river.

"Still alive, Uncle?"

"I need a smoke," said Uncle Keller weakly. "And I could use a couple gallons of horse liniment . . . Let me do my own runnin' now, Joe. I'm too heavy for you to carry. Besides, you'd better git on ahead. They were plenty powerful mad at you when you broke away. I heard everything."

"I'll carry you," said Joe. He knew Uncle Keller was in no shape to walk, and might be laid up for days. "It's easier to throw them off the trail with one set of tracks than two, anyway. It's an old trick I learned when I was a Boy Scout."

"The way you socked that one guy with an apple did me good."

"I used to be the pitcher for the South Side Wildcats."

"And those last three kids that tried to run in front of you—you hollered like thunder at 'em and they beat it! By crackies, that did me good!"

"I used to be the tenor in the quartet," Joe laughed.

When darkness came over the apple forest they made camp on a grassy knoll somewhere many miles down the river. The low steady roar of the Silver Falls was barely audible. Close around them were the ceaseless sounds of falling apples.

Uncle Keller, bandaged and patched and somewhat restored, murmured that these were peaceful sounds to sleep by, and he doubted whether he would wake up for forty-eight hours. Privately, Joe was worried for fear the old man might never wake up. It would be a tough pull, to live after the ordeal he had gone

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through.

But Uncle Jim Keller was tough. After many hours of sleep, he took nourishment and grew talkative and began to complain over losing his pipe. Joe decided he was on the mend.

THEY were too near one of the river villages to make a permanent camp here. When a searching party came too near, Uncle Keller awakened Joe out of a nap and they broke up camp in a hurry.

"Let's make some more tracks, Joe."

Another day, another camp.

There was nothing to do but eat and sleep and keep out of sight. Uncle Keller was coming back, slowly. He slept seven or eight hours out of every ten, which was all to the good.

But he complained about his troubled dreams. "I keep dreamin' about those boys that circled that girl with their horns, and finally got her when she fell. Sometimes I dream it's me instead of the girl. And sometimes it's you, Joe. And there I am, whirlin' on the whirligig, an' everything's dizzy and blurry, an' I keep faintin'."

"What are we going to do, Uncle?"

"Die in exile, I reckon. We've got no way back to the Earth. An' you've cooked your goose with Donna and all her people—for life."

"Don't rub it in," said Joe.

Another day, another camp, and another dream.

"You know what I been dreamin' lately?" said Uncle Keller. "You was married to her, living back in Bellrap, U. S. A. You had three half grown kids, with seven horns apiece, and when the mayor came for dinner he mistook one of 'em for a hat rack—"

"Cut it out!"

"An' when the minister's big fat wife came and greeted you folks and started to hug your wife, the way she hugs everyone, her double chin got hooked on Donna's shoulder an' she let out an awful holler—"

*"Stop it!"*

Another day, and still another camp. They were moving deeper and deeper into the uncharted forest of big blue apples. With them went the strange feeling that someone was following them. That was Joe's dream—that they were always about to be overtaken.

"What are we going to do, Uncle?"

"Stop and live out our days, I reckon. . . . I know where there's a space ship, Joe. It's hid in a hillside—"

"Uncle Keller, you wouldn't!"

"I never said nothin'." Uncle Keller munched innocently at a shiny blue apple.

"After all the damage I've done to Donna," Joe mumbled, "I'd be the worst heel in the world if I ever—"

"Quit kickin' yourself in the face. It gives me the back-ache," Uncle Keller growled.

"Besides, that space ship wasn't exactly hers. It belonged to the Venus scientist she was always talking about. I'll bet a hundred dollars he has stolen her away from Axloff, by now, in spite of the choosing ceremony. Axloff was too easy-going. But that Venus scientist was the sort of guy who would steal whatever he wanted. There's something phoney about that guy."

"You think so?"

"By now, he and Donna are probably honeymooning around the rings of Saturn."

UNCLE KELLER tossed the apple aside, and turned, with difficulty, to rest his lame hips on softer grass.

"You know something, Joe? I can't figure out why you think a perty girl like Donna would want to marry a guy with white hair and long white whiskers."

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"Who's got white hair and long white whiskers?"

"The Venus scientist."

"Huh? Who says so?"

"That's what Donna always told my wife an' me when she was stayin' with us back at Bellrap."

"White hair! Whiskers! Are you nuts, or am I? . . . Ye gods, then *I've never seen the Venus scientist!*"

"Of course you haven't."

"Then who the devil was that *black-haired guy* I stole the horns from?"

"How do I know who you steal from?"

"Something was screwy, Joe realized. He began to pace back and forth. His anger and confusion mounted. "When I went back and found that black-haired guy, I apologized to him—*apologized,* mind you—because I'd figured out that he was Donna's scientist boy-friend."

"And he admitted it?"

"Not only that. He sprung this plan for dehorning the natives as a scientific experiment. He told me it was all my idea and I should go ahead and promote it."

"Hmph."

Joe was blazing with anger. "Is that all you can say? *Hmph?*"

"Sonny boy, it looks to me like you've walked into somethin'."

## CHAPTER XII

JOE stopped pacing and stared at Uncle Keller, studied him from head to foot, wondering how soon the poor fellow would be well enough to move under his own power. He couldn't be left here in the forest alone. But Joe was breathing hard with ire and lust for revenge. Did he dare go back and settle a score or two—or die in the attempt?

A rustling sound from a nearby thicket caused him and Uncle Keller to turn.

A Martian was approaching them—a stately horned man with a yellow workman's jacket and puffy pantaloons. In one hand he carried an orange-colored apple, in the other, what appeared to be a small loaf of bread.

Joe recognized him at once. But he courteously introduced himself as he advanced.

"I am Ruffledeen, the well known chef of Apple Forest. I have seen you before. Do you remember me?"

"We remember," said Joe. "What do you want?"

"Would you care to try my latest cake?"

He offered the loaf to Joe, who stood with arms folded. A suspicious offer, to say the least. What sort of man offers you a cake with one hand while he holds a poison apple with the other?

"I'm not very hungry," said Joe, "thanking you just the same . . . No, Uncle Keller is not very hungry either."

"I just et," said Uncle Keller.

"My cakes are very famous," said Ruffledeen, not in the least disturbed by this cool reception. He came a little closer. His wavy purple whiskers, shining in the thin shafts of sunlight, again reminded Joe of a bunch of purple grapes. He continued, "This is my latest creation."

He fairly forced the loaf into Joe's hands. Joe scowled. It was incredible that this man should have wandered into these depths of the forest by accident.

"What brings you here?"

"I often walk through the trees," said Ruffledeen. "I enjoy the peace of the trees. Sometimes I meet people, and if I think they are in trouble I tell them."

"That's a laugh," Joe snorted. "I'm already up to my neck in trouble. Anything you might tell me couldn't make any difference."

"That is bad," said Ruffledeen.

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"Sometimes people are so deep in trouble that they will eat the orange-colored apple."

"I've thought of that all by myself, pal," said Joe, with a hint of desperation that made Uncle Keller wince.

"But I did not offer you the orange apple. I have given you the cake. Will you give your sick friend a part of it?"

JOE broke the loaf and handed half of it down to Uncle Keller, who lay resting on an elbow. There was an awkward pause. Uncle Keller sniffed at the cake. It smelled delicious. But he stalled, his glances shifting from Joe to Ruffledeen to the poison apple.

Joe acted as if he were going to take a bite, then he too stalled, taking refuge in a bit of friendly conversation.

"You must be tired, Ruffledeen. Do you want to sit down with us? . . . No? . . . Er—you mentioned a warning of new trouble? Go ahead, give us the worst."

"Very well," said Ruffledeen. From his expressionless face he might have been discussing the balmy weather instead of an approaching storm. "Some unknown criminals are entering the villages every night to seize some unsuspecting native."

"Kidnappers, huh?"

"Horn removers."

*"Horn removers!"*

"When I left the last village, *thirty-five persons had already been dehorned.* You two foreigners are being sought for these nightly crimes. New search parties are being organized. *You will be killed on sight."*

*"We*—? Ye gods! That black-haired, lying scroundrel—that double-crossing hornless four-flusher!" Joe was on fire with the passion of revenge. He tightened his fists, and the cake twisted into a doughy mass in his hands. It contained something hard, but at the moment Joe was too enraged to notice such trifles as cakes. "By George and by Joe, there'll be murder!"

"Careful! My c a k e!" Ruffledeen warned. "I have baked it especially—"

"The cake!" Joe snorted. Then recovering his manners, "Yes, the cake. Thank you so much . . . Does Donna Londeen believe I am guilty of this dehorning stunt?"

"She knows," said Ruffledeen, "that you proposed the idea to the leaders. That was a mistake."

"Then she believes—"

"I cannot say what she believes. I cannot say whether her uncle believes that she herself may be involved. I can only say that she wants to see you."

Ruffledeen began to walk away as slowly and mysteriously as he had come. He gave a definite warning, however, that he was not to be followed. He made them agree.

Joe called after him. "You say she wants to see me? Wait! Tell her where to find me!"

"It might cost her life if she tried," Ruffledeen moved on, his back now turned to Joe.

"Tell her I'll come back and find her —very soon—as soon as Uncle Keller doesn't need me. And if she isn't already married, tell her not to marry that black-haired devil. Tell her to marry Axloff—"

"Perhaps I will tell her where I last saw you," said Ruffledeen, "if you like my cake."

"Of course we'll like your cake," Joe called. "We'll eat every bit of it! Won't we Uncle?"

Ruffledeen looked back once again before he disappeared. Joe and Uncle Keller were eating their cake.

"It's a good cake, so far," said Uncle Keller, smacking his lips. "Oh-oh, what's this? I just bit into somethin' hard."

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## CHAPTER XIII

JOE turned to Uncle Jim Keller. "I bit into something, too. That chef must make his cakes out of rocks . . . Well by George and by Joe, look at this." His worried look changed to a boyish grin. *"It's the bowl of your corncob pipe."*

"Eh? By crackies," Uncle Keller's bright black eyes shone under beetle brows. "I've just bit into a *pipe stem.* Now how do ya reckon—?"

"Ruffledeen the chef must have rescued it for you at the Festival."

"He's gone to a lot of trouble, followin' us around the forest. But anyhow we're saved."

Joe scowled. "Saved? How do you figure that? There's a bounty on our scalps."

"Don't worry, son. I've got my pipe. I'll have a good smoke an' dream our way outa trouble."

"You and your pipe dreams! I'll rely on footwork, in this strange country. Come on, we're moving."

"Hey ain't we gonna wait an' see if Donna comes?" Uncle Keller whined.

"With any kind of luck, we'll meet her half way. Com on, Uncle. We're breaking camp."

"Now be reasonable. I just got my pipe filled."

But Joe gathered up Uncle Keller in his arms and strode off in the direction that Ruffledeen had gone. Uncle Keller thought he felt well enough to walk. But Joe preferred to lose no time. The light gravity of Mars gave him strength and speed to spare. And the cake he had just eaten was full of quick energy.

"Son," said Uncle Keller, "you're headin' back to the river, square into danger."

"Scared?" said Joe.

"We'll run into a thousand Martians with ten or twelve horns apiece and git ourselves horn-jabbed into human pincushions."

"Lost your nerve?"

"No, but I'm proud," said Uncle Keller. "If Donna Londeen carts my dead body back to the Earth, I want the Bellrap citizens to know it's me, not some fancy Martian mince-meat. Where we goin'?"

"To overtake Ruffledeen. He must be a friend or he wouldn't have brought your pipe. I'll make him lead us to Donna."

"S t o p!" Uncle Keller demanded. "These trees are drippin' blood. Look at my hand."

Joe stopped. On the back of Uncle Keller's hand was a drop of blood. It had fallen from somewhere overhead. Joe looked up into the trees. He squinted.

"Whatcha lookin' at son?" Uncle Keller squirmed to his feet, and stood, a bit wobbly, looking up through the branches loaded with apples.

In this strange land, where big blue apples were constantly ripening and falling with an almost rhythmic thump . . . thump . . . thump . . . upon the ground or upon the horns of unconcerned natives, and where one lone orange-colored poison apple could be seen near the top of every tree, and where the natives had purple hair and six fingered hands and several horns on their heads and shoulders, it might seem that visitors from Earth should not be surprised at any other odd sights But here Joe and Uncle Keller stood, near a thicket along the bank of a small stream, staring up into a tall blue-apple tree.

*Forty feet above them a Martian hung between two branches. Blood was dripping from his head. He had just been dehorned. He hung motionless, and to all intents and purposes appeared dead.*

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## CHAPTER XIV

A SMALL pool of blood on the ground revealed that the man had occupied his high perch only a few minutes.

"How in blazes did he git up there?" Uncle Keller mumbled.

Joe frowned. For a moment he stood, his fists planted on his hips. He studied the tree from trunk to topmost branch, calculating the difficulties that any dehorning party would have climbing up. A fight out on those high branches would have been perilous. But there were no signs that anyone had fallen.

"Do you reckon they chased him up," Uncle Keller asked, "an' gave him the business when they got him out on the limb? . . . I don't git it."

"He's alive!" Joe muttered. "I saw him move." He shouted, *"Hi, up there!"*

"Hsssh!" Uncle Keller flung his hands up for silence. He whispered, "Great guns, Joe, you'll have us murdered in no time. How far away d'ya reckon his dehorners are? Right over the bank, most likely. That job's fresh from the ax."

"Too neat for an ax," said Joe calmly. Then he called again, in his best Martian accent. "Hold on, up there. I'll come up and help you."

The Martian, a typical villager in a soiled red workman's suit, turned his bloody head and tried to look down. He uttered the one word, "Come!"

The tree would have been a tough climb on the Earth. But Joe's lithe muscles, aided by the comparative weightlessness that he enjoyed on Mars, made him equal to the feat. All the way up, his thoughts whirled with conjecture. How? How had this job been accomplished? Had a machine hurled this victim? Surely no team of men could have thrown him to this height.

Nine horns had been removed. There were three bloodless stumps on each shoulder, three on the crest of the head. But the saw had evidently slipped, gouging his head and the flesh of his shoulders in several places. The fellow's locks of purple hair were matted with blood and sweat. His face was tight with pain.

"Do not let me fall," he begged. He was too badly injured to try to help himself. He looked down forty feet to the pool of blood on the ground, and acted as if he would fall from dizziness. It was hard for Joe, astride the branch, to administer first aid. But he stuck to his job. Then, with the aid of his rope he lowered the man from one branch to another, and at last to the ground.

"Where are they?" Uncle Keller's Martian accent was faulty.

The victim shrugged. He thought the question referred to his horns. "Off," he said, pointing to his head.

"Where are the guys that chopped 'em off?" said Uncle Keller, lapsing into his own brand of English. "I'll bet they're hidin' along this crick, layin' fer us."

"Off," the Martian repeated sadly. "Gone. The masked men attacked me with saws. I fought. They seized me. They flew with me. Then I saw them without their masks. They wanted my horns. They got them."

"*Flew* with you?" Joe echoed, his face a question mark.

"It was horrible. My horns—I was so proud of them. I cannot talk about it. But—thank you. I will go now—this way." He barely fought off a faint, then, slowly, he began to walk.

"You're in bad shape," said Joe. "We'll tag along."

THE three of them followed the bank of the stream. Night came on and they kept trudging, with the aid of

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torches. The bandaged man declared that he must reach the Silver River. The waters would heal him.

"I need you," Joe said to him over and over. "You must tell me who did this thing to you."

"I will talk after I have reached the healing waters."

"If you would only rest—"

"Let us hurry on," the Martian said.

Uncle Keller grew weak, and Joe was obliged to carry him. This pace was slow and cautious. Joe's eyes grew blurry, watching for trouble from every black shadow of every tree trunk.

Before morning Uncle Keller dropped out. He would follow at his own speed, he promised. And Joe understood. Exhaustion had overtaken the old fellow. He would undoubtedly sleep before he tried to finish the journey.

From then on, Joe carried the Martian—carried him in a sitting position to keep him from complaining of the dreadful pains in his head and shoulders.

"We will reach the healing waters soon after dawn," the Martian said. "But for you I would have died from loss of blood. I owe my life to you."

"You, in turn, will save my life," said Joe. "You will tell your people that I am not the man who removes horns."

"Tell my people?"

"Yes. Otherwise they are going to kill me for what I haven't done."

"But I—I cannot *face* my people, now that I have no horns. I *cannot!*"

"You'll have to! It's the least you can do. Promise me that you will."

The Martian drew a painful breath. "I will talk after I reach the healing waters."

The pink light of morning came at last. A soft cloud of mist could be seen across the clearing by the river. The low roar of the falls came from that direction. The tributary that Joe followed circled to the west of the Silver Falls village and joined the river two miles downstream. Uncle Keller might find his way here by daylight without being seen.

The Martian bathed in the shallow side of the great bend. He ate a little, and slept. Joe waited. Would the man fulfill his half of the bargain when he awoke? Or would he be in the mood to kill every hornless foreigner?

JOE lay on his stomach, his head propped in his hands. He almost dozed. From a distance the soft sounds of falling apples, like the lightest patter of raindrops, lulled him to unconsciouness.

The grass rustled. The Martian was rising slowly. Joe sprang to his feet, stood squarely before the man whose life he had saved. The poor fellow passed his hands over his head and shoulders to convince himself that the awful happening was no dream. For a moment Joe thought he would weep. He bowed his bandaged head, closed his eyes.

"Now I know how Donna would feel if she were ever deprived of her horns," Joe said to himself. "And to think—I had wished it—so I could marry her! Why did I dare fall in love? Uncle Keller warned me . . ."

In that moment Joe knew the pain of having to fight when you're already beaten.

"Courage," he said to the Martian. "You've lost your horns, but you're still alive. Let me tell you a secret. There *are* such things as *imitation horns.*"

"Imitation?" The Martian's eyes lifted slowly.

"I've seen them. In fact, I've worn them, a whole set. They strap on with a harness, and you smear grease paint around your shoulders and ears so the

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harness won't show. When you get fixed up, no one will know the difference."

The Martian's eyes glowed. He pressed Joe on the arm. "You have already befriended me. If you can find horns for me, I will do anything you ask."

Joe's face set with a fighting determination. "There's only one thing I have to fight for now. It's that other hornless man—the one we left behind. If you can fix things so we won't be killed—so I'll have a chance to get him back to his home—that, and clear the decks for a certain girl—

"What would you have *me* do?"

"Get well, so you can tell them—"

*Plop!*

An orange-colored apple struck the ground within fifteen feet of them. It burst with a sp. v of reddish liquid.

Where the devil did that come from?" Joe muttered. The nearest tree was several yards away.

"Quick! Take me from here!" the Martian cried.

Joe swung him off his feet and bore him away. They ran downstream. This gave them the advantage of a wider clearing between the river and the forest.

"What are we running from?" Joe said, slackening his pace, now that he had failed to sight any danger.

"Do you not know of *naggie madness?*" said the Martian. "Let me down. We are out of danger now. But it is lucky the poison apple did not burst upon us."

Joe mounted a stone and looked back over the terrain. "I don't see anyone."

"Someone was there. Someone threw the apple."

"What if we'd been hit? Are those poison apples sudden death?"

"Not death but *madness*. Have you never seen a naggie gone mad from eating one? It run all directions at once and smashes into trees."

"I saw a girl that acted like that one time," said Joe reflectively. "They spoke of her as a 'naggie girl.' She was running like wild. A bunch of young fellows were chasing her, and I think they meant to kill her."

"Of course they did," said the Martian. "When anyone gets the madness of the naggie, *he must be killed*. Nothing less than the Ring of Death will serve, if you become a 'naggie man.' "

Joe understood, at last, the mystery of the girl he had tried to rescue on that first memorable day. So it was madness that had caused her to cut the rope and fall to her death on the waiting horns—a madness that came from contact with the wrong kind of apple.

The Martian stood beside Joe, gazing across to the bank of trees. No one could be seen, yet both men knew that an enemy was closing in. Poison apples don't roll across the clearing by accident.

"We've got to walk into the village at once," said Joe. "You've got to tell them who attacked you—"

"But not until you get horns for me."

"We can't wait for that. We'll go at once."

"No. The *horns*—"

Slash!

A spear plunged through the Martian's side, just above the left hip.

## CHAPTER XV

THE *horns!*" the Martian repeated.

Joe would always remember that moment of pride and glory in the Martian's gesture toward his high head, imagining the horns that would be replaced, according to Joe's promise. The expression went sick all at once, as the spear whizzed up from the river bank to plunge through him.

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The Martian stumbled forward, clutching his side. Miraculously, he recovered his balance and ran to the riverbank. Joe saw him dodge a flying rock, then plunge over the bank, hugging the spear as he dived, *aiming it.*

*A shrill cry rang out. The Martian* had caught someone on that same spear.

Joe leaped to the bank and saw. It was that foreigner Rabbit Face, who had caught the spear-head through the heart. The handle broke. The dehorned Martian, with the broken stub plugged through his side, backed away and sank down against the sloping earth, still watching. Blood spurted from the rabbit-faced man's mouth. His cry choked off. His eyelids fell, and he was dead.

"Rabbit Face!" Joe muttered. "What the hell was *his* game?"

"He was one of the gang who took my horns," the Martian said. "Another had scarred hands. And there were others."

"Talk fast," said Joe breathlessly. The Martian's life was ebbing away. "Tell me everything. Tell me—"

"They flew over in a house."

"A house?"

"A house with wings and a roar."

"A plane or a rocket ship! Go on."

"They meant to tie me to a tree . . . as they have done to others . . . But I fought . . . It was then that the flying house appeared, and stopped near me . . . When they took me in, I saw . . ."

"Yes, go on. Go on!"

"I saw their faces without masks. I saw the piles of horns they have gathered into their flying house, like bundles of wood. We flew. When they finished with me they immediately dropped me from high in the air, and I fell to the forest. But the fall did not kill me, and you found me."

"Was there a black-haired man?" Joe asked anxiously.

"The leader . . . and I recognized him. . . . His color . . . *changed* . . ."

"What do you mean? Who was he? Speak up! Tell me!"

"From another world . . . *His color . . . changed . . .*"

That was the last. The Martian died in Joe's arms.

TWO dead men at Joe's feet. One, a man born to wear horns with pride, and Joe looked upon him with tenderness. The other, a hornless fellow whose schemes Joe was beginning to understand. He and his friends, from "another world" were here to gather horns as ivory traders might gather elephant tusks.

But Joe was also aware that at least two other men had had a share in this attack, for he had caught a fleeting glimpse of their retreat down the river a moment after Rabbit-Face was killed. He doubted whether either was Scar-Hands or Black-Hair. They were two of the assistants—with horns—although the horns might have been imitation.

Later, as Joe related the whole fracas to Uncle Keller, he theorized that these two who raced away could well have been Martians, somehow forced into Black-Hair's game. For it seemed likely that men with a flying ship could have done their killing with guns or rays, if they had wished.

"But instead, what did they do? They resorted to such Martian devices as poison apples and spears."

"That means," said Uncle Keller, "that they figured to shift the blame."

"And with a few Martian stooges already lined up, doing their dirty work, they'll get away with it. That makes it all the harder to deal with. These spear-throwing apple-throwing people won't have any conception of what a clever enemy they're up against."

Joe and Uncle Keller were trudging

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back into the forest slowly, thoughtfully.

"Did you have any hankerin' to stay and bury your Martian friend?" Uncle Keller asked.

"I wouldn't have dared," Joe admitted. "The natives came thick and fast within five minutes after Rabbit Face let out that awful death cry."

"I heard it myself. By crackies, I was scared it was you, Joe."

"That's no compliment to my voice." Joe grinned. "Remember, I sing first tenor in the Bellrap quartet."

"I figured you were practicin' grand opery," Uncle Keller chuckled.

As they tramped along, they did their best to keep up a gay front. But it wasn't easy.

"We're like a couple of convicts slated for the chair," said Joe. "The one guy that might have saved us has got himself bumped off, and we're trying to be cheerful about it."

Uncle Keller was philosophical. It was something to know who your enemies were.

"I always figured if I was gonna be hanged, I'd rather be hanged in the daylight than in the dark."

"So you won't miss out on the show, I suppose," Joe mumbled.

"Yeah. An' so I'll know who to haunt when I get to be a ghost."

"Well, You can haunt a black-haired, smart looking fellow of medium height, who speaks good English, like all of these men-about-planets. He's probably from Mercury. He flies some sort of ship, and has a crew of helpers—"

"And is as tricky as the devil, pinnin' this whole dehornin' scheme on us."

"But the Martian told me one thing about him, right at the last, that I can't figure out," said Joe. "Something about his *changing color*."

They pondered this mystifying remark. Uncle Keller had a theory.

"It means he turns yellow. He's a coward."

"That might be right if we were on the Earth," said Joe. "But turning yellow doesn't mean anything to a Martian."

"Why not?"

"Because it's just an expression. An American expression."

Uncle Keller couldn't get that through his head. He argued stubbornly.

"I figure if a guy's yellow, he's yellow, whether he's an Earth man or a Martian or a Mercurochrome."

"You mean a Mercurian."

"I mean a yellow guy is a coward, in any language," said Uncle Keller.

Joe had his own theory that the color change was from white to black; that the black-haired scoundrel from Mercury, and the white-haired scientist from Venus might be the same person. He had never seen Donna's scientist friend. But wasn't it a reasonable guess that a man skillful enough to disguise himself in a harness of horns might also disguise himself in white hair and whiskers?

"I've got it doped out," said Joe confidently. "It's like this—"

But Joe's theory blew up before he could tell it. For at that moment, as they walked over the crest of a wooded hill, they looked down on the camp of the Venus scientist. Donna and her sister were there. So were Axloff and a few others. But the dominant figure was the white-haired scientist himself. He was not Black-Hair. He was like no one Joe had ever seen before.

## CHAPTER XVI

DONNA was more than cordial. She was genuinely joyful. She came running, calling so eagerly that everyone knew these were the two Earth friends she had lost.

"It is so good to see you, Joe. I was

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afraid you had fallen into wrong hands. . . . And you, Uncle Keller, you are able to walk. You look strong. I am so glad."

The scientist's guards approached, putting away their weapons as they came. Axloff extended the warmest of welcomes to Joe. He was the same handsome, boyish eleven-horned rival that had competed with Joe for Donna's hand. Yet, as before, Joe felt the sincerity of his friendship.

"To you, Uncle Keller," said Axloff, "I apologize for striking you so hard with my horns."

"I reckon you had to do it," said Uncle Keller philosophically. "One guy's meat's another guy's poison, they say."

Axloff scowled, trying to decipher the maxim. "Poison? What we did to you is not to be compared to poison. Have you ever seen the naggie leap from its four hoofs when it tasted poison?"

"I saw some gal run when she was naggie-crazy," said Uncle Keller.

"Then you know how dreadful it is. We brought no such harm to you, bumping you with horns."

"Well, nothin' to make me run, if that's what you mean. By crackies, I couldn't even walk. But I'm gettin' spry again."

"Big news," said Donna. "I have learned that Axloff is the son of my scientist from Venus."

Joe's jaw dropped. He looked from the tall eleven-horned young stalwart across to the hornless white-haired man.

"You'd better say that again. I didn't quite catch it."

"Do not frown so," Donna laughed. "It is true. Axloff, *who has eleven horns*, is the son of Axotello, *who has no* horns. And I am told that Axloff's mother had no horns."

Joe stared blankly. "How is that possible?"

Donna held up her hands. "Do not ask me to explain such mysteries. That will be for Axtello, whose business is to puzzle over the strangeness of the universe. He is forever writing his scientific observations, but never reading any conclusions aloud. Come, you must meet Axotello now."

Then Joe and Uncle Keller found themselves being introduced to one of the boldest scientists of the interplanetary world of science.

HE WAS tall—as tall as Axloff minus the horns. His face was broad, with a massive white forehead beneath flowing waves of white hair. His features might have belonged to a dignified judge or a minister on the Earth. His eyes, however, were related to the cat family, Joe decided—the eyes of a lynx or a leopard—large, amber-colored eyes partially covered by the straight upper lids. His white whiskers, clean-trimmed like a Southern colonel's, only emphasized the breadth of his face.

In spite of white hair and whiskers he was, above all, youthful.

Joe, shaking the man's strong, solid hand, felt a return of that emotion which had swept through him before. He was jealous. This was the man who had befriended Donna and made her a gift of a space ship—the man she had hastened to see, on her return to this planet.

And with the sudden wave of jealousy, Joe also felt himself dwarfed. Physically, he was perhaps the shortest man of the group—

But one remark from Axloff reminded him that he had already made his mark as a tough, hard-fighting champion.

"This is the Earth man, father, who fought me to the finish in the festival competitions," Axloff said.

"I am most proud to welcome you to

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my camp," said Axlotello. "And may I compliment the good judgment of your Earth city in choosing Donna for honors. You have presented a silver cup to her, I believe."

"I'm going to present it. That is—" Joe grinned, slightly confused, "I came along to Mars for that purpose. I figured it should be done in public."

Uncle Keller chimed in, "Joe hankers for an audience whenever he does anything."

The scientist smiled and the others laughed, more at Uncle's manner and accent than his words.

"What's more," said Uncle Keller, "Joe's the Bellrap city clerk, and I'm the clerk's clerk, and we figure Bellrap can do with some free advertisin'. Ring the bells for Bellrap, that's our motto—"

"S-s-sh! You and I are talking too much," said Joe. At the same time, amid his confusion, he was asking himself, "Now where did I leave that silver loving cup? Somewhere in Donna's space ship, or—"

"Come this way, Joe," said Donna. "You and Uncle must join Axloff and his father in a feast Ruffledeen has prepared."

JOE feasted, but he felt uncomfortable—as if he had been plunged into a convention of Donna's boy friends. However, the dinner became a rollicking affair. Troubles, the scientist said, could be met later. Now was the time for merriment and song. Uncle Keller furnished much of the merriment, Joe his share of the song.

Ruffledeen walked past the camp.

The scientist nodded to the chef as he passed. Ruffledeen may not have noticed. Like a stray cat he cast curious sidewise glances. Someone called a compliment to him. His feast was perfect. He did not respond. He only stroked his wavy purple whiskers and walked on.

To his assistant cooks he spoke in private. Presently they gathered up their portable kitchen and followed him out of camp.

No one was surprised at this. In fact, no one but Joe seemed to pay any attention. For it was Ruffledeen's mysterious way to cook for anyone he wished, as long as he wished. There was no contract between him and the Venus scientist. On another day he might be found serving his fancy dishes to the people of any river village, or to the young judge from "Up North," or to Donna's hardboiled old uncle, Londeenoko.

Joe watched the purple-whiskered chef wander away, followed by his two assistants. As often before, Ruffledeen was carrying a poison apple. It seemed to be his favorite habit.

"Will he come back?" Joe asked, looking from Donna to Axloff, and then to the wise-eyed Axotello.

"Who knows?" said Axotello. "Who cares? We never lack for food in this bountiful forest."

His handsome, eleven-horned son said, "No, father, we never lack. But some of us are better equipped to catch our food than others."

Axotello smiled faintly. "My son never ceases to enjoy his advantage of having horns. He is always afraid a falling apple will injure me. For my part, I do not mind the thump of the largest blue apple. My head is hard. The only apple I fear is the orange-colored one. And I would fear it even if I had horns. But I never sit beneath it. I leave that to my careless son."

Axloff looked up, then, and to his chagrin, discovered he was sitting directly beneath one of the dread fruit. He moved, and everyone laughed.

They laughed more, a moment later,

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when a large blue apple dropped and struck his father squarely on the head, and upset him from his seat.

"It is your turn to move," Axloff laughed.

"No," said the scientist, quietly amused. "The law of chances will not put another apple directly above my crown—"

He was looking straight up, and his words broke off abruptly. Everyone looked up. Joe saw, through an opening between leafy branches, what all the others saw. He heard the low steady roar.

"What a bird!" Uncle Keller mumbled.

It was a black metal object flying above the forest tops, below the clouds. It was shaped like a narrow oblong tube with triangular wings tight against its sides.

"That's no bird," said Joe. "That's the flying house that took our Martian friend for a ride."

## CHAPTER XVII

WITHIN a few minutes the scientist's camp was on the move. By late afternoon it was established in a deeper and darker part of the valley, not easily observed from overhead.

Axotello was not convinced that the ship portended any harm for him. He had made no enemies. But he preferred to carry on his work out of sight. Off and on, through the years, he had carried out experiments in this land. By keeping off the well beaten trails along the river, he had seldom been molested.

But now it was well known that a band of horn thieves were at work. Joe and Donna, as well as Ruffledeen had seen the evidences with their own eyes.

The scientist listened to these reports with great interest. If a Mercury gang had come to Mars to pillage, there might be great trouble in store.

But Axotello himself did not say, "Let us get together and fight these desperadoes and put a stop to their ugly game."

Instead, ostrich-like, he buried his head deeper in the sand of his own private interests. "Let us move," he said, "into deeper shadows. I do not want to be annoyed by spies from the air while I proceed with my studies."

A little distance from the new camp, Joe rested under an overhanging cliff, free from falling apples. Exhausted from many continuous hours without sleep, he slept heavily until evening.

When he awoke, Donna was beside him, smiling at him.

Joe rubbed his eyes, yawned and grinned. "This is a pleasant surprise."

"A herd of naggies were grazing along this ravine," said Donna. "I did not want them to wake you."

Joe took her hand. Love is like that, he decided. You think of little courtesies, things you wouldn't think of ordinarily.

"Did Uncle Keller get some rest?" he asked.

"He snored like a broken-down space ship," Donna laughed. "But now he is at his usual occupation, smoking his pipe, filled with the wool of the naggie. He is also writing in a notebook. See him over there?"

Joe nodded. Uncle was keeping a record of all expenses, real or imagined, which the Mars adventure had entailed. He had some fanciful notion of presenting a bill to the city of Bellrap, if he ever got back.

"There he sits," Joe said, pointing to a clump of trees beyond the camp. "He thinks the Bellrap treasury will pay for all our hours and discomforts, because I'm the city clerk—"

"And he calls himself the clerk's clerk. But why should Bellrap pay—"

"Because I came on official business.

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That silver cup. I intend to make a public presentation. If I had it here now I'd—"

"Where is it?"

"I put it—er—let me see—" Joe almost remembered. But something else attracted his attention. "Donna, you're carrying a gun!"

"Yes, a ray weapon. A gift from the Venus Scientist."

Joe felt a wave of warmth sweep through his face and neck. "Donna, I wish you wouldn't—I mean—well, he's a nice fellow and all that, but I wish he wouldn't give you so many gifts."

"You Earth men are funny," Donna laughed. "He is my friend, and if there is trouble from Mercury men, I should not be helpless. You should have a gun too. I would not want you to be helpless."

SHE patted his arm as if to calm his ruffled spirits. But Joe rose now, and straightened to his full height. Not that he was tall. Once she had called him short, and in fact he was slightly under avarage height. But he felt tall, and stood tall, and he wasn't going to have anyone call him helpless.

"I can help myself," he asserted.

"Then why do you not help yourself?" she said, and rose to stand beside him.

"I will," he snapped. "I'll tackle these damned desperados single handed, if necessary. I'll show your people who's making the trouble. I'll—"

"You will help yourself," Donna repeated.

Then he took her in his arms and held her, fiercely, possessively. "I'll help myself," he echoed, and then he was thinking only of her.

He kissed her. Her large purple eyes did not close, but watched him intently as his lips blended with hers. He took strength and boldness from her in that prolonged moment.

"I am going to marry you, Donna," he said tensely.

Donna nodded and spoke almost without breath. "I know it, Joe. I've known it since—since you won me at the Festival?"

"Did *I* win you? But I was forced to run out—"

"You won me," said Donna. "Axloff knew that you won me, no matter how the Festival ended. He knew that my heart went to you. But you must win me again, Joe. You must clear your own name and mine, with my people."

Joe's head was swimming. "If I can, Donna—"

"If you can, then I will marry you—in my heart."

"In your heart! What do you mean by that?"

Donna's eyes filled with tears, and she tried to bury her head in his shoulder, without touching him with her horns.

"How can we marry, except in our hearts," she sobbed softly, "when I have horns and you have none. Where would we live? Who would our friends be?"

He kissed her forehead and her eyelids. Then he shook her by the shoulders, and again he spoke fiercely.

"I intend to win you, Donna, whether I can ever marry you or not."

Uncle Keller, pipe in mouth, came limping down the ravine, clinging to the wooly neck of a naggie. In the soft twilight, Joe could have imagined it was a white sheep, except for the three perpendicular horns across the top of its head.

On one of the beast's horns an apple barely clung. It looked *yellowish* as the naggie moved through a shaft of light.

"A poison one!" Donna gasped. Then she screamed. "Uncle!" Let it alone!"

But Uncle Keller was too intent on

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his purpose to hear. He succeeded in cornering the naggie and was jerking a handful of "smokin'" from its wooly neck, when the beast turned and rammed at him.

The poison apple burst and spilled its orange liquid over Uncle's bare arms.

"Well, by crackies!" Uncle muttered to himself, giving an angry puff on his pipe. "Shower bath without a towel."

## CHAPTER XVIII

DONNA gripped the ray gun and moved silently down the slope. Joe was right back of her. She stopped, shuddering, and leaned close to him. She handed him the gun.

"You'll have to do it, Joe," she said. "Make it quick, before he knows we're here."

"Donna, I couldn't. I simply couldn't," Joe whispered.

"You've got to. It is the easiest way for him. In another moment he will be a mad animal—"

"Let me get a rope and tie him."

"What rope would hold him? You would only prolong his suffering. Besides, he will have crashed into trees before you could get a rope. There he goes—no, not yet. Please—"

Joe moved a step closer and took aim.

Uncle Keller came up the ravine slowly and stopped in the thin shaft of sunlight to examine his drenched hands. He shook the broken bits of orange-colored apple flesh from his wrists. He held his handful of naggie wool up to see whether it had been damaged.

The ray gun in Joe's hand steadied toward the gaunt old man's heart, but the handful of naggie wool momentarily confounded Joe's aim.

"Go ahead," Donna whispered, choking on her own words.

"Wait till he puts his hands down."

"Go on and shoot. The ray will sweep him clean."

"If I don't—"

"The villagers will get him on their horns. You couldn't let a poor, limping old man race against the Ring of Death. Here, I'll do it."

"I'll do it," said Joe. His aim was sure, now. He pressed at the trigger, but not quite hard enough. Then Uncle Keller looked up and saw the two of them.

"Hey, up there!" he called. "Look at this mess o' poison on my hands. That derned naggie—*Joe! Are you aimin' somethin' at me?*"

Joe lowered the gun. He looked to Donna. Tears were streaming from her eyes.

"Not now," she whispered. "Wait till he flies into madness. But *why doesn't he?* . . . Wait, Joe, there's something strange . . ."

They escorted the bewildered Uncle Keller to Axotello. Here, indeed was a case for a scientist's investigation. For as the minutes passed, he exhibited no symptons of becoming a "naggie man."

"By thunder, Joe, you had me half scared for a minute," he said, chuckling. "When I seen that gun pointin' toward my midsection, you looked almost like you meant business."

Joe couldn't say a word.

THE scientist proceeded to fill a test tube from the liquid that he carefully washed from Uncle's arms and wrists, and some minutes later, when he fed a spoonful of it to a stray naggie, the beast went mad and stormed off into the forest like a cyclone. But Uncle Keller was not affected.

"I can't figure what the fuss is all about," said Uncle Keller innocently.

"We do not understand why you have not contracted naggie madness," said Axotello.

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"Me? Oh, I'm tough," said Uncle Keller. "I never git nothin' like that. Never had the measles or mumps er—"

"I will keep you here under observation," said the scientist.

Through the night Donna and Joe tramped together through miles of forest, toward the east. Over and over they pondered the strangeness of the day's events. And whenever they came back to Uncle Keller's narrow escape from death, they were struck by dread terrors of what might have been.

By morning they reached the bluff where Donna's space ship was hidden. Within a few minutes they were cruising west, high over the land of big blue apples.

"Please sit down back there," Donna said. "A space ship pilot should not allow herself to be kissed while the ship is in motion."

"Pardon me," said Joe. "'I forgot we were in motion."

From their elevation the whole forest land was spread out below them like a vast map. Yellow sunlight and blue shadows highlighted the ridges along either side of the winding Silver River. The falls could be discerned. Farther downstream were the clearings, paralleling the river like cow paths. Joe identified the bend where the dehorned Martian and Rabbit-Face had met death from the same spear.

Up and down the river the small villages could be seen—mound-shaped houses peeking out like patches of toadstools in a garden of ferns.

"Sooner or later," said Joe, "we'll see a big black bird sailing over those tree tops."

"That metal bird may see us first," Donna remarked.

Joe's plan of action was simple. He would force Black-Hair to confess his guilt in public.

"This ray gun will do the trick," Joe declared.

. .

ON THE night's hike to the ship he had practiced. It was a unique weapon. On a steady aim, its ray could cut a circular hole, two inches in diameter, through an apple a hundred yards away, and leave the apple hanging.

His plan was simple. He would spot the black-metal ship and trail it until it stopped. Then he would wait in hiding until he could catch Black-Hair and Scar-Hands on the ground.

"I'll march them in front of your uncle Londeenoko, and Mobar the judge, and all the villagers we can gather in."

"And suppose Black-Hair and Scar-Hands refuse to march?" said Donna. "Will you shoot them down?"

"They'll march," Joe declared. "I have a hunch Black-Hair is a coward. The dying Martian spoke of his changing color."

"He may be smart enough to know you won't kill him. A dead man can't confess."

"With this gun I could plug holes through his arm. I could remove his fingers, one, two, three, four, five—"

"I hope he doesn't kill you, Joe. He could do it you know, and be a hero. For the dehorning crimes happen to be on your head, not his."

Joe drew a deep breath. "If only we could catch him in the act. If—"

"If only we could have some authority like Londeenoko or Mobar the judge *with* us *when* we catch him. . . But on one point I must correct you, Joe. If Black-Hair is who I think he is, he is not a coward. What does he look like?"

In answer, Joe took pencil and paper and began to sketch. Donna, holding the ship at the lowest air cruising speed, drove down toward the tree tops within a half mile of the river. She was a clever pilot, and dared to skim so low that

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the morning shadows of the tallest trees flicked across the windows of the ship.

Joe finished his sketch. He turned it upside down.

"I remember him best the way he looked when I hung him by his feet and jerked his horns off. . . Well, how does he look to you? Pretty fancy sketch, huh?"

Donna's lips tightened. "I hate him," she said.

"Then he is someone you know?"

"Too well. He tried to force his friendship on me when I made my trip to Mercury. He was a national hero in the Interplanetary colony at that time. He had done some exploring in his ship, The Black Comet, and they called him the Black Cometeer. I was introduced to him at one of the Colony parties—"

"And you fell for him?" The warmth of Joe's forehead betrayed his quick jealousy.

"At first, Joe, I was a bit overwhelmed," Donna admitted. "But soon I began to suspect him. He had falsified some of his claims. He had held back some valuable information that he owed his government. You see, his secret commercial schemes were already forming."

"Have you seen him often?"

"Only once, here on Mars. He followed me back and came to see me when my father was still living. Father was the judge, and it did not take him long to discover that this dashing Black Cometeer meant to steal from Mars. He even invited father to join him. Father quietly persuaded him to leave the planet. But he must have returned recently with this vicious plan. He is evidently stealing horns for the Interplanetary ivory trade."

"He's clever," said Joe. "Aside from you and the scientist's party, there are probably no people on Mars who do not believe that I started this wave of horn-thievery."

"He is clever," said Donna. "And he will not easily take on the color of a coward."

ONE of the instruments in the control panel had been humming a faint musical note. Now it swelled to an insistent volume. It was the metal detector. The black-metal ship was being approached.

After a series of switchbacks, they knew the exact spot beneath the leafy forest branches where it was concealed.

It was an hour's work to find a suitable hiding place for their own ship within easy walking distance of the Black Comet.

"No telling how many villagers have seen us by this time," said Joe. "They seemed to be on the move all along the river this morning. But their seeing us won't make any difference if we can march that black-haired cometeer to justice."

Joe had sketched a rough map of the region from the air. As soon as they left the ship the map became indispensable. The clearing a mile to the south was familiar.

"That's where the spear deaths took place yesterday morning!" Joe exclaimed. "The river is just beyond."

"It is also where we saw villagers gathering this morning," said Donna. Then she pressed Joe's hand in a gesture of restraint. "Look!"

A long line of villagers with spears was moving out into the forest from a river trail.

From a clump of bushes Joe and Donna watched.

"I have counted three hundred," Donna whispered, and still more are coming."

The long line moved swiftly, stealthily, single file, its members spaced about

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thirty yards apart. It passed at a distance of a quarter of a mile from their hiding place. It began to circle. Soon Joe knew that a huge trap of spears and horns was being formed.

"They expect to find the dehorners inside the circle," said Joe. "They'll gradually close in, like hunters on a round-up."

Donna trembled against Joe's shoulder. "It is the largest Ring of Death I ever saw. They must know that they are about to enclose the black-metal ship."

"Then they'll enclose the Black Cometeer," Joe said, "also Scar-Hands and all the rest of the gang."

"But our ship they will not enclose!" Donna exclaimed. "Luck was with us when we hid it."

"But what about us?"

"We are already enclosed," said Donna. "We will soon find ourselves at the center of the ring."

"Face to face with the Cometeer," said Joe, "I *hope*."

## CHAPTER XIX

THE ray pistol shot noiselessly. A spray of leafy bushes fell over with a quiet swish. The bolt of disintegration had cut the stalks like a hot steel blade through candles.

"Our camouflage," Joe whispered. Then seeing that Donna did not know the word, he added, "We will disguise ourselves as bushes."

Donna smiled. "If you had not shaved in camp yesterday, more bushes would not be needed."

They cloaked themselves in the bushes of shrubbery. They ran and walked and crept, by turns, taking advantage of every screen the forest provided. Within a few minutes they were nearing the center of the guarded area, and not once had they been seen.

Joe knew it was a race against time and chance. If the dehorners, working somewhere within the circle got wind that a great Ring of Death was closing in, they would leap to their ship and fly off.

A naggie path cut across a bit of open meadow. The wide patch of blue sky was what Joe had been looking for.

"A ship could find its way through that opening," Donna observed.

"Then it's in that ravine where the stream curves into the cliff," Joe said.

A moment later they were feasting their eyes on the famous Black Comet. Its blue-black metal sides shone where patches of sunlight filtered through the overhanging trees. It was set with its nose toward the meadow clearing. Its plastic windows revealed the gleam of its interior trappings.

"I don't hear anyone," Donna whispered. "But they must have left someone on guard . . . Joe, where are you going?"

"Inside. You'd better wait here."

He held the ray pistol ready. He slipped from one tree to the next. He discarded his shoulder covering of shrubbery as he neared the final curve of the ravine. He stood in the ship's shadow, then, and braced his hand against its cool polished side.

The open airlocks awaited him. Three quiet steps. The brilliant lights of the interior dazzled his eyes. He clung to the handrail and paused, on the third step. The smell of machinery mingled with an odor slightly reminiscent of a butcher ship. Looking back into the passenger compartment, he saw the horns.

There were five or six bundles of them, stacked like faggots, lying on a mat on the floor. A spot of sunlight through the window highlighted them, and in their varied shades of pink and white they gleamed.

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The sight was breathtaking. More than five hundred persons must have been dehorned to make such a pile. This outrage could grow into a permanent strife between planets.

A barely audible snore sounded from the control cabin. Joe moved forward a few steps until he saw the strange peaceful face of a hornless man—a Mercurian, no doubt—lying asleep beside the controls.

The keys that dangled from the man's fingertips gave Joe his cue. It was plain that those keys would fit the slots in the control panel.

Another low snore.

JOE slipped the keys from the sleeper's hand. He crept back to the air-locks. He heard a stirring and groaning. But he was away, now, keys pocketed, ray pistol on the alert, and nothing could stop him.

"You keep the keys," he said to Donna as they hurried on. "I might run into a bullet or a flash of disintegration. But if you can tell your uncle what I've seen—"

"And if the ship cannot get away—"

"We'll have them, by George!"

They camouflaged themselves again and chanced a view from a hilltop. The villagers with spears were a long way off, as yet. They could be seen plodding along, jabbing at clumps of bushes and searching among the crags and other natural hiding places. In an hour or less they would close in, and when they did so, they meant to have a gang of dehorning criminals cornered.

"I can see Uncle Londeenoko pacing," said Donna, "trying to hurry them along."

"If I thought he would listen to reason, I'd have you go to him," said Joe.

"He will listen to reason when we make the criminals confess, not before. I will stay with you."

They moved cautiously down into the next wooded valley. The mischief makers would be between here and the nearest river village, unaware that they were being surrounded. It was the logical place for them to work, just over the hill from their parked ship, near enough to the river trail to kidnap new victims. For many a curious Martian would gravitate toward the scene of yesterday's killing, a short distance down the river.

"Watch everything," Joe warned. He was growing tense. "If they catch one hint that these woods are being combed, they'll by-pass us and make for their ship."

It would have been a surer bet to hide near the Black Comet and wait till the larger circle brought them in. But the hope of catching them in the act drove Joe on.

"We are on the right trail," said Donna. "Listen!"

A muffled cry came from a victim tied to the trunk of a tree. It was a half grown boy. His horns were gone. Bandages had been slapped over his mouth to keep him from shouting. But his choked cry could be heard faintly.

Another one! A Martian girl in her adolescence was bound to the very next tree. Her clothing was torn, her hair was in sad disarray, her eyes were tear-filled. She had ceased to struggle or try to call.

A third, a fourth, and a fifth! All of them were gagged so they couldn't cry an alarm.

"We can't take time to release them yet," Donna warned. "The gang must be just ahead."

She and Joe ran, then, and the beat of their footsteps mingled with the thump of falling apples. They ran back of the line of victims.

A sixth victim was an old man, whose scalp had been gashed. Donna knew

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him.

"Free him, Joe. He may die before we get back to him."

Joe slashed with his knife. "Which way are the masked men?" he demanded.

THE bewildered old man wasn't sure. Released, he slumped, and lay at the foot of the tree, feeling his hornless head, weeping.

A seventh victim, and an eighth. Then no more.

"Which way did they go?" Donna cried. "We will capture them."

The seventh victim nodded ahead, the eighth victim indicated that he thought they had gone back. Now the line of victims had run out. And no gang could be seen in any direction.

But over the rise, several yards beyond, the spear-men appeared, closing in with their Ring of Death.

"The gang must be hiding down in that thicket," said Joe, "or else we've followed the line the wrong way."

"Come!" Donna called.

Now free of all camouflage, they retraced their steps on the run, cutting back toward the first victim they had found.

Joe slashed the bonds of the sobbing boy, and jerked the bandages off his mouth.

"Which way did they go? Have you seen them lately?"

"I could hear them," said the boy. "But they stayed back of these trees, out of my sight. I could hear them gathering up the loose horns."

"Which way?" Donna cried.

"*That* way, I think. Or *that* way."

They ran back to the girl with the tear-filled eyes, to set her free.

"Tell us—"

BUT Donna's demand was checked by an unexpected outburst of vicious temper. The girl, gathering her torn clothes about her, pointed at Joe.

"You did it!" she wailed. "I know you without your mask. I saw you at the Festival—"

"Quiet, you idiot!" Donna caught the girl's face in her hands and shook her. "If you can't tell us where they went, don't talk. They must be here—"

"They must have slipped through our fingers," Joe said. "To the ship!"

They ran to the crest of the rise. A line of spear-men was marching toward them. The Black Comet had already been passed, and no doubt a number of men had stayed to guard it.

"We are trapped," said Donna.

"Not as long as I have this!" Joe jerked his pistol.

"Do not shoot them, Joe." She caught his free hand, and they backed away from the advancing line.

Joe spoke through clenched teeth. "I could melt those spears right out of their hands."

"No, Joe. It is too dangerous. If you cost them one finger or the tip of one horn—"

Swish! A brown spear came through the air, straight like a bullet.

Joe shot at it. Whether by luck or good marksmanship, the disintegration ray caught it and dissolved it in the air.

Thirty or forty Martians must have seen it pass into nothingness.

Another spear started through the air. With less luck than before, Joe nevertheless shot the point off. Then with crisscrossing strokes, the ray cut it into a dozen pieces. The advancing Martians saw the scraps fall to the ground. Several of the men stopped in their tracks.

But one flank of a dozen or more, being ordered to charge, lowered their heads and came forward on a run.

"Stop!" Donna cried. "Stop! We are not the ones!"

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They would not have stopped, however, but for Joe's swift work with the pistol. The disintegration ray sliced through the base of five small trees. The timbers twisted and toppled to form a barricade of branches.

The Martians stopped abruptly. They began to back away. For any weapon capable of dropping trees to the ground might conceivably play havoc with men's horns, or arms or legs.

This momentary halt gave Donna her chance to call out, "We know whom you are looking for. We are looking for them too. Let us join you."

"You are Donna Londeen!" one of the spear-men answered. "Your uncle, Londeenoko, does not deny that you may be assisting with these crimes."

"My uncle should know better," Donna flung back at them. "Let your circle close in, and you will find the criminals you are searching somewhere in that ravine. They have made victims of eight more of our people."

"Eight more! You had better be right or it will be bad for you. March ahead of us," the spokesman ordered. "We will hold our spears until we have talked with Londeenoko."

Ten minutes later the circle closed in from all sides, to become a wall of spears and horns around the newly released victims.

The round-up was complete, then. But oddly, it had netted no one but Joe and Donna.

## CHAPTER XX

LONDEENOKO'S voice was heavy with anger. For two or three minutes he simply roared without saying anything. His massive face grew red with rage. He paced around within the ring, and Joe and Donna kept turning to face him.

Joe still held his gun. More than a dozen times in the past few minutes he had felled branches of apples or whole trees in the paths of Martians who showed too much eagerness to hang him on their spears.

The effect had been noteworthy. Although he was a marked man, well remembered from the festival, they were inclined to treat him with respect. Although he was, from all appearances, their prisoner, they preferred to keep their distance. No one volunteered to walk into the center of the ring and take his gun away.

The eight dehorned Martians were now being treated for injuries outside the circle, and were the objects of much attention. Some of the spear-men were urging them to step forth and identify Donna and Joe as the horn thieves. But these victims were too dazed or humiliated or just plain mad to agree on anything. Amid the wrangling, their immediate testimony came to nothing.

It took the hard-boiled, red-faced Londeenoko to weld the mob spirit of these several hundred angry men into a swift, if ruthless, legal action. Unquestionably, they believed this hornless man deserved to be perforated with spears or horns. But first, he deserved to be duly convicted.

Londeenoko's roar gradually became more distinct. Then Joe realized he was raving more at Donna than himself.

". . . such a disgrace! It is criminal beyond words! And to think that your own father was the most honored judge we ever knew. What would he say if he knew his own daughter had betrayed us—"

"Stop!" Joe shouted. "You can't say those things to her."

"Who says I can't?"

"You are not the judge," Joe said savagely. "If you were, you might want to hear the truth. You might listen—"

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JOE'S voice was lost in the angry uproar. Three spears came flying through the air. One went wild over Joe's head. Another made Donna dodge, and even so, it thumped through her horns. The third would have struck through her breast if Joe hadn't caught it with a ray from his pistol. With phenomenal accuracy he took it, and it was gone.

Londeenoko roared for order, and he marched twice around the circle to give the spear throwers his best tongue lashing.

Then he came back to Donna and Joe.

"Your crimes will cease from this hour," he said. "After all we have seen, after all the horrible evidence you have created against yourselves, there is nothing to do but order the two of you to be put to death at once."

"Suppose we refuse to die," Joe snarled.

"At one word from me, the spears will strike you from all directions."

Joe breathed fire. "Are you so sure? With one sweep of my weapon there will be no spears. *And there will be no men!*"

"You are not that swift."

"Shall I show you?"

But Donna cried, "No, Joe. Don't kill them. Make them listen. Tell them that if they kill us they will not end this trouble. The horn thieving will go right on."

Londeenoko's eyebrows jumped. "So you admit your gang is so highly organized—"

"We admit nothing," Joe snapped, "except that we know who the horn thief is. I'll bring him and his gang to you if you give me a chance."

The half grown boy, recently dehorned, squeeked his comment to this boast.

*"Give him a chance, and I will help him, because he set me free."*

It was a small, piping voice, but it weighed heavily, in that moment, against the roar of Londeenoko. The big, crusty man hesitated. The boy happened to be one of his many grandchildren. If there was one thing that Londeenoko tried to avoid it was an argument from his children and grandchildren. They had a way of banding together and upsetting his firmest decisions.

"We will hold court here and now," Londeenoko growled. "I will appoint my officers—"

"Here comes the judge!" Someone shouted.

Judge Mobar, attended by one servant, came stalking up through a thicket from the direction of the river. The circle broke to make a place for him.

As usual, he was a dramatic figure in his official robe, wearing the overlapping squares of bright green paint on his face. His eyes were depths of darkness. His dark hair was bushy over his ears. His horns were highly polished.

Three apples hung upon his horns, and this might have been taken to signify that he had come on a long jaunt through the forest.

The young judge took command immediately.

His servant escorted him across to Londeenoko, who gave him the dignified greeting befitting any judge.

"I did not know you were in this part of the valley," Londeenoko said, half apologetically.

"I see that you have captured the foreigner who is known to have proposed our most horrible crime wave," said the judge. "I trust you did not intend to let him escape."

"No verdict has been reached," said Londeenoko.

"Verdict? Do you imply," the young judge said sharply, "that you would have held court without me?"

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LONDEENOKO showed his fighting face. "You were absent when we organized the ring of spears, Mobar. How were we to know that you had not returned to your land 'Up North'? No one has seen you recently—"

"Spare me your excuses," Mobar said. His young face was hard. The green squares on his cheeks and forehead, bright in the sunlight, gave him a metallic cast. It was difficult for anyone to defy him, if only from his stern mouth and deep eyes. "As you see, I am here at the time I am needed. We will proceed with the case."

Judge Mobar seemingly had won out over Londeenoko, as usual.

Yet some whispers around the circle were evidence that Londeenoko's sharp thrust had hit home. It had reminded the crowd that Mobar was comparatively new and not well known. He had come as an intinerant judge, from "Up North"—that mysterious realm of the unknown, from which anyone might be said to come if he did not wish to tell precisely where he had been.

To Joe, Mobar said, "Step forward, you. Another step . . . There . . . Now answer my questions. Where do you come from?"

Joe looked to Donna. She nodded for him to go ahead and answer.

"From another planet called the Earth."

"What is your business?"

"I am the city clerk of Bellrap."

"Bellrap? What is Bellrap?"

Joe had to explain the nature of his Earth city and the duties of a city clerk. He admitted that he came in a ship that could travel through space, and that another Earthman was with him, but he did not mention Donna.

"We have already surrounded the ship," Londeenoko interrupted, much to the judge's obvious discomfort. "We have stationed guards and have bound the sleeping man who occupied this ship."

The judge scowled deeply. "Were any evidences found to explain these dehorning crimes?"

Someone replied that stacks of horns had been discovered in the ship.

"I will examine the ship myself in a few minutes," said the judge. "What do you call this weapon that you hold?"

"A ray pistol," said Joe.

"Did you bring it from the Earth?"

"No."

"Where did you get it?"

"I borrowed it."

"It came from another planet, you will admit?"

"Yes."

"Then you will also admit that you have friends from other planets who are helping you with your dehorning crimes."

"I will not. I am not engaged in any dehorning crimes."

"Will you show us how the ray gun operates?" said Mobar. "There is a heap of fallen apples against that tree trunk. Shoot at them."

JOE shot into the heap. With a slight turn of his wrist, he disintegrated six or seven apples and cut holes through others. He sliced a niche four-fifths of the way through the tree trunk. The tree trembled and a shower of apples fell.

Then he held the gun, as harmless as a cob-pipe, in his hands, and waited for the agitated judge to proceed.

"This demonstration proves," said Mobar, "that this Earth man is equipped to slice horns off our heads. You admit this, do you not?"

Joe admitted it, but he added, "Look, Judge, if I were slicing your horns off, I would never go to the trouble of tying you to a tree. You know that all of these victims have been bound. And

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the jobs look like they've been done with a meat cleaver or a hack saw. Now if I were doing it—well, step out, Judge and I'll show you how easy it would be if I were using—"

"Silence!" Mobar snapped. "There will be no further demonstrations. Where did the gun come from? From your Earth?"

Again Donna nodded for him to go ahead and answer, so Joe said, "Venus."

Mobar turned to his servant. "Examine the gun and see if the Earth man is telling the truth—"

The servant approached to take the gun. Joe hesitated.

"Let him examine it," Donna advised.

Joe looked at the servant's extended hands. They were caked with a layer of yellow mud. They had apparently been dipped in the slime of the nearby ravine recently, for they were not dry between the fingers.

Those mysterious hands waited for the weapon. Joe started to hand it over, when—

*Plop!*

An over-ripe apple fell and struck one of the hands, scoured a patch of yellow mud away, to reveal that *scars marked the flesh of that hand.*

Joe took two backward steps. He gripped the ray gun firmly.

"Get away from me, Scar-Hands!" he barked. "Stand where you are, everyone. You want to know who the real horn thief is, don't you?"

"Yes!" Londeenoko shouted above dozens of others.

"Well, I'm telling you right now, because he's right in this circle, wearing artificial horns. He is—"

*Smack!*

The poison apple, thrown by someone Joe did not see, struck him squarely on the back of the head. He felt a stinging sensation. Almost instantly he went naggie-mad.

## CHAPTER XXI

JOE knew he was mad. A hundred wild impulses struck him at once. The strongest impulse was to knock down a tree. Any man, woman, or naggie would crash into a tree, Joe remembered, when seized by naggie-madness. And that was his uncontrollable desire.

Joe crashed into the first tree he saw. He struck it hard with his left shoulder. The trunk cracked off its base and the whole tree fell. (Joe forgot that previously he had almost cut the tree down with his gun.)

Now all the men around him knew he was naggie-mad, and he was fully aware of it. But he was nonetheless mad. The heat of the naggie poison circulated through his body like wild fire.

Donna called to him in a shrill terrified voice. She wanted him to run.

He wanted to run, but there were so many other things he wanted to do at the same time. He wanted to clip Londeenoko's mustache off. So, with his deadly accurate ray gun, he clipped the mustache off.

The men were hastily forming three concentric circles, and the innermost was a small, fierce circle of lowered heads with deadly horns that all pointed at him. It was moving toward him.

He wanted to play leap frog over it, and over the second and third circles, too. But first he wanted to trim Scar Hands' toenails. So he shot in that direction.

"I didn't know you could dance," he yelled at Scar Hands. "Dance some more! . . . That's wonderful. More! More! Dance till your horns flop off!"

Then he wanted to give Mobar a haircut where the hair was too puffy around his ears. He wanted to see how black that hair was under the wig. So he

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shot in that direction. Not all of his aims were perfect. He was too full of mad, wild impulses to care about the results.

"Let the chips fall where they may!" he yelled, clipping another lock of Mobar's hair. "Turn your face, you green-faced checkerboard. I'll trim your profile. I'll change your color, like the Martian said."

He remembered clipping a niche along one side of Mobar's face. And while he still was obsessed by the desire to draw the outline of the judge's features, it seemed high time for him to move. The spears were coming at him.

"Let the lady out!" he screamed.

But Donna was already on the outside of the third ring, he discovered. Where she was, he wanted to be. So he played leap-frog over the three rings.

A flying spear ripped under his left arm, tearing the flesh. A pin-prick. What did he care for flying spears? He cleared the last barrier of men, cutting two spears out of the air. The men ducked and fell to the ground to avoid the unseen ray of his gun. A spray of foliage showered from a tree caught in its path.

He ran at Donna as if to strike her with his head.

"L-O-O-K O-U-T!" he yelled, in a weird, wild voice.

THE brambles a few yards beyond would be a sticky place for her to land if he knocked her off her feet. Why not land in them himself? He leaped over her head. His strength, increased by the light gravity of Mars, had never been so great as now.

He sank into the brambles, but came up with a bound and broke into a dead run. The scratches burned his arms and legs, and the torn flesh in his side smarted in the wind. But these were nothing to the explosive fire that filled his whole body—naggie madness!

He was all of the planet's mad men rolled into one.

He was all of the swiftest footracers of Mars, rolled into one.

He was a bulldozer with invisible wings. If he dodged trees instead of smashing at them headfirst, it was only because he was looking for bigger game.

He whirled when a spear slid along the ground near his feet. He saw them coming, no longer with spears, but with most determined horns. He pointed the pistol over his right shoulder, and shot a zigzag line through the overhead branches as he ran. A green shower fell to the path in his wake. His pursuers found themselves in a tangle.

Long before he reached the river he had outdistanced them, all but one.

He still held his gun. It could destroy anything. Persons? Of course. Trees? The very largest. The river? Perhaps.

What of the powerful waterfalls? Could he cut it into pieces with the disintegration ray?

He dodged tree and rocks, he leaped bushes, he followed the river to the falls. We wished the people of Bellrap could see him now—the strongest, wildest, maddest creature that ever lived! The freest, the least controlled. He was Joe Banker, the "naggie-man" of Mars!

He looked back. Donna dodged behind a tree. She alone had followed him all this distance. He could see the line of her pink shoulder, the green-and-white stripes of her abbreviated sport costume.

So she was still following him.

She would see him disintegrate the waterfalls.

He shot the ray at the falls, but nothing happened. He could the line that marked the penetration of the ray, but the water filled it instantly. The gun was no good.

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"It's no good! No good!" Joe yelled, and he threw the gun to the ground.

HE WOULD fight the waterfalls with his bare hands. The falls were powerful, but so was he. He would show them!

He climbed up on a rock, and made ready to dive. He looked back. He knew Donna was screaming at him not to do it. That was because she didn't understand. He was an Earth man. He liked a fair fight.

But there was better rock than this to dive from, so he climbed down and went to it. Then he discovered a still taller one. He clambered up its steep sides. The scratches and prickles and torn flesh were nothing to the fire that burned inside him. He was naggie-mad.

He made ready to dive.

But suppose he should encounter a huge fish—with horns! He should have his gun.

Donna had the gun now.

That was all right. Let her come along. If they met a huge fish with horns, she could collect the souvenirs.

"You go first!' he shouted to her.

She began to back away. Maybe she didn't hear.

"Ladies first!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

She was running away. He would have to catch her and throw her in. Then he would plunge in after her.

Whenever the clouds hung heavy or the breezes blew strong through the forest of falling apples, the villagers chased for shelter. They ran no risks of being struck by an orange-colored apple. It was well known that poison apples frequently fell during rains or windstorms.

Now the clouds had gathered, and the horned pursuers took heed and gave up their chase for today.

Consequently, only Donna saw Joe going through his horrible antics. She alone followed the wild trail of his comings and goings.

That he was in terrific physical torment, she did not doubt. He was completely unpredictable. Any new chance impulse might set him off on a new tangent.

When he failed to overtake Donna to throw her in the river, he threw a log in, instead. It splashed beautifully, and darted over the falls, and he yelled, "There you go, Donna!"

Then, "I'll catch up with you!" and he threw another log in. "There goes Joe Banker! He used to sing tenor in the Bellrap quartet!"

Joe turned and ran, then, crashed into a tree. The blow was a knockout. He passed out cold.

## CHAPTER XXII

DONNA was carrying him. A falling apple had awakened him. The wind was whipping the trees. The low rumble was not thunder, but apples thumping down the slopes and filling the ravines.

He was a heavy load for her, and she was having a hard climb against the wind. Darkness was coming on. Her horns were loaded with apples, all of them. She hadn't taken time to rid herself of the extra weight.

A wild exultation filled Joe's heart. He awakened laughing.

"I never would have believed it. I love being mad if it earns me this! Let me carry you awhile."

"Quiet," said Donna. Her eyes were wide, frightened. "Do not squirm. I will take you back to the ship. You were stunned by a hard blow. I do not know whether you were seriously injured, but I—"

"Injured! I feel wonderful. Let me carry you!"

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"Do not shout. If the villagers hear you they will kill you."

Joe gave forth a shout that would have put the loudest roar of Londeenoko to shame. He shouted because he was happy. He was with Donna.

"Just let them try to kill me for that!"

"They could do it, and they may."

"Impossible. I'm too happy to be killed. Hooo-whoopie!"

Donna ran with him. Often she looked back through the falling apples and spattering raindrops to see whether any Ring of Death was following.

Suddenly she stumbled on a rolling apple and fell. Her arms released him. He scrambled to his feet, yelling. "So you want to play!" He grabbed all the apples and began throwing them at her.

She lowered her horns to catch the first volley—her instinctive self-protection. At the same time, she ran backward, watching his every move.

He stooped to pick up an armload of apples. He looked up to see that she was running away. He threw at her. He threw at everything, the trees, the clouds, the village a mile away, the falling raindrops. Then he raced after her, but she was swift.

She still had the gun, and now she played his game of c u t t i n g down branches as she ran, to obstruct his path. When she felled a tree, he shouted gleefully.

"Now we'll play. I'll throw the whole darned tree at you and see if I can knock you down!"

But it was a heavy tree and he couldn't lift it. So he kicked it. Then he grabbed his foot, and gave a howl of pain, laughing at the same time.

DONNA was far ahead of him, descending a ravine that Joe remembered. Her space ship would be there. Maybe she would enter to escape the storm. The rain was growing heavier.

He heard the click of the airlocks. He sprinted down the bank.

"Wait for me. It's raining!"

A spotlight turned on him. He liked that. He stopped to wash his hands in it. It looked so warm in the thick darkness, and his hands were wet and cold.

The spotlight moved. Joe moved to keep up with it. It was shining from the side of the ship. The ship was moving. Joe ran and tried to keep abreast. The ship leaped ahead a short distance, then waited. Then hopped again.

"So you want to play games!" Joe yelled. "Just give me a chance to climb aboard."

Donna gave him no such chance. But she was playing a game, all right. She was leading him back to the camp of the Venus scientist.

It was almost morning. The rain had ceased.

Ruffledeen the chef and Axotello the scientist were holding a conference around the fire. Uncle Keller was snoring gently on the soft camp bed nearby. A wide canvas roof had been hung high among the trees to protect Ruffledeen's camp kitchen.

The fire was low. Two lights hung from posts to enable Ruffledeen to sort through his pack of recipes. He and the scientist were comparing notes. For many of the special cakes on the chef's list there were corresponding records in the scientist's file.

"Formula number 327," the scientist would say, "was an attempt to lengthen life."

"I have fed more than nine hundred cakes from this formula to old men and women of this forest."

"Yes, here is a record of their ages at death!" And the scientist would review the periods of feeding, and compare their average length of life to that

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of a similar group not treated to such cakes.

Later, "Formula 420 was our experiment in altering the shapes of horns from straight spikes to graceful curves."

"These cakes were fed to infants," said Ruffledeen. "We have also given many to expectant mothers, but I think the results have been negative."

This was frequently Ruffledeen's comment, or that of the scientist. They could not hope for success with the great majority of their feeding experiments. For one or two successful experiments, dozens or hundreds might end in failure. But the one or two might prove a boon to the whole population.

Uncle Keller ceased to snore and began to stir.

"Shall we give him another round?" asked Ruffledeen.

"A warm drink first, then more questions," said the scientist.

UNCLE KELLER was not in the best mood. He had been subjected to endless questioning since his recent encounter with the poison apple.

"I ain't slept a wink," he complained.

"I will bake a cake to help you sleep soon," said Ruffledeen. "But first, Axotello wishes you to remember some more of the foods you eat on the Earth."

"Yes," said the scientist, "Go on with your list, please."

"What did I end with?" said Uncle Keller.

"You named thirteen kinds of pies, including apple pies. You stated that you have eaten no blue apples before you came here, but that red apples are common and yellow apples are not unknown. This statement may be the key to our problem. Were your yellow apples anything like our poison apples? Maybe you have grown up with a resistance to poison."

Uncle Keller shook his head. There was more difference than he could explain. On the Earth anyone would be a fool to call a yellow apple poison.

When Axotello tried to pin him down to the probable differences in chemical content, Uncle lost his temper.

"Stop it! I don't like scientific words. How do I know but what you're callin' me names behind my back?"

The scientist smiled and told him to go back to bed and finish his night's sleep. This Uncle Keller gladly did.

"The next logical move, Ruffledeen," said the scientist, pacing back and forth in front of the fire, "is to experiment with the other Earth man."

"How?" Ruffledeen asked.

"We will break a poison apple over him," said Axotello. "If he does not become naggie-mad, we will know that Earth man's diet holds the secret."

Ruffledeen produced a poison apple from his stores and sat by the fire polishing it.

"And suppose," said Ruffledeen, "that the other Earth man does go naggie-mad?"

"Then he will simply become one of our unsuccessful experiments. Too bad, of course. He is an alert young man. I have high hopes that he will be immune—"

"Someone is coming over the hill," said Ruffledeen.

In the early morning twilight they saw the silhouettes of the two running figures, several yards apart. "Donna!" the scientist exclaimed. "She is running from someone. Quick, my gun! Guards, where are you?"

The camp came to life almost before the echo of Axotello's voice had faded. Wet branches were falling from the trees along the ridge, being shot down by a disintegration ray gun in Donna's hand. Her pursuer was hurdling these barriers like a deer.

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"It is Joe!" Axloff cried, running up to join his father. "Joe! Donna! What is happening?"

It was Donna who cried, "Don't shoot him, Axloff. Only catch him and tie him. He is crazy from a poison apple."

## CHAPTER XXIII

JOE heard the commotion in camp. He shrieked with laughter to hear them say he was naggie-crazy. He already knew it. He had known it since yesterday. Were they just now finding it out?

So they meant to catch him and tie him, did they?

"Bring your stoutest chains, Axloff!" Joe shouted, "No rope will hold me!"

The confusion from the camp annoyed him, so he leaped a high thicket and cut a course in front of Donna. She was forced to run in another direction. The camp was left behind.

On the third hill beyond camp he overtook her.

"Whew! You run too fast!" he said, with a laugh that was almost a bray. "I can keep up with your ship as long as it jumps like a frog, but I can't keep up with you. You don't have to point that gun at me, Donna. I already love you. I'm going to marry you as soon as I remove your horns. . . . Here, stand right up against this tree. It will only take a minute."

Joe, please! Please let me go! You don't know what you're doing. You're out of your head. . . . Oh, why did I not shoot you?"

" 'Cause I'm too good looking," said Joe. He guffawed. "If you want me shot, let me do the dirty work."

He tossed her gun over his shoulder. His hand flashed back, tearing a strip from his water-soaked shirt. He bound her hands behind the tree.

He bound her feet with a twisted piece of his sleeve. With the remainder of the shirt he made a band around the trunk above her head to include her three head-horns, tying them back securely.

"You don't happen to have a saw, do you, madam?" he said, smiling happily. He wiped the sweat from his eyes.

From his trouser pocket he brought forth a sturdy pocket knife.

Donna was eyeing him steadily. "Listen to me, Joe. Do you know that I am trying to save your life? Do you understand that?"

"Remind me to give you a quarter," said Joe. He whetted the knife on the palm of his hand. "Plain or fancy, madam?"

"Joe, you are naggie-crazy. By all the rules, I should have killed you. But I thought I could exhaust you, making you follow along with the ship. You'll die in a few hours, Joe, at the rate you're burning up your life. If you could only control yourself—make yourself rest—give Axotello a chance to help you. By now he may know why Uncle Keller didn't go crazy. Please, Joe, listen to me."

"You're trying to stop my fun. I want to cut your horns off."

"Kiss me, Joe," she said desperately. She was at the end of her wits. "Kiss me, Joe!"

"Ha, ha, ha! So you want to play games. One kiss for each horn I remove. Here we go."

He began to wield the knife. He muttered that the handle was too sharp and the blade was too dull, and he had just as well turn it end for end. So he did. He tapped her horns with the handle and gripped the blade until he noticed blood was dripping from his hand.

"Darned knife's no good," he said. "Hold it for me while I go get a saw."

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"All right," said Donna. "The scientist has a saw among his tools. I will wait."

He placed the open knife in her bound hands. Then he scampered away, bounding like a deer.

THEY caught him at noon.

It took the whole camp to do it, and as matters turned out, Ruffledeen became the key man. It was one of his sleepcakes, more than the pit-fall trap, that turned the trick.

But almost everyone helped, and the suggestions by Uncle Keller were invaluable.

"Let Donna act as a decoy," Uncle insisted. "Set a beartrap in the path, and cover it over. Then put Donna on the other side of it."

"I am afraid," said Axloff, "that he will pay no attention to Donna, being crazy."

"He's not that crazy," said Uncle Keller.

Donna had freed herself and hurried back to camp, and was urging Axotello to do something.

Joe could be heard carrying on his mad antics beyond the hill. He had forgotten about Donna's horns and was now engaged in a fight with her space ship, beating its metal nose with a timber.

"He cannot hurt anything," Axotello said. "As long as he is bumping around up there we can work on a trap. But if he starts back to the village we must overtake him, or they will slay him."

THE scientist's swift workers grabbed their spades, ran to the appointed spot, and made the loose dirt fly. Everyone helped, and they soon had a deep pitfall in the path. Uncle Keller marveled. On the Earth such a task would have taken all day.

Ruffledeen, who had hastened to make a triple-potency sleep-cake, came trudging up the grade to see what the "bear-trap" looked like. By this time it was covered, and looked like a part of the path, surrounded by a wide scattering of fresh earth.

The chef got down on his hands and knees to convince himself that there was a covered pit. Someone shouted at him to come away.

Then Axloff yelled, "Quiet! Here they come!"

The mad chase came over the hill, Donna well in the lead. She had attracted Joe's attention, according to plan, and was running straight down the path toward the camp. Joe was gaining on her, shouting again that he wanted her horns.

She leaped over the pitfall, slackened her pace, looked back to see what would happen.

Joe came on. Ruffledeen drew back out of his way. But Joe didn't fall through.

Instead, he stopped on the path within three feet of the hidden spot. His mad merry glance took in the scattered dirt. Then he gave Ruffledeen a push. Ruffledeen went down in a shower of dirt.

Joe enjoyed this effect. It was interesting to see the chef surprised and hear him yell for help. Joe sat down and dangled his feet over the edge of the pit and watched the show.

No one else seemed to be around. Actually, the others were watching anxiously from concealment, wondering what the mad man would do next.

He was in the mood to rest, so he sat there, calling down to the imprisoned chef. He had always been attracted by Ruffledeen's wavy purple whiskers.

"You should eat more of my cakes and you might have purple whiskers," said Ruffledeen. "I have one cake down

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here. Will you come down and join me?"

"Why don't you run back to camp and bake some more," said Joe, "and we'll have a party."

"But I am down here," said the chef.

"Let me take your place till you come back."

Joe leaped down. After a superhuman struggle, he managed to get Ruffledeen out. Then he ate the one cake while he waited.

He never knew how long he waited, because he went to sleep. When he awakened, he was bound so tightly to a tree he could hardly breath.

## CHAPTER XXIV

"BOW! Bow-wow!" he yelled. "Bow-wow-*wowrr!*"

Uncle Keller and Donna emerged from a camp shelter and sauntered toward him.

"Poor guy," said Uncle. "I doubt if he'll ever come out of it."

"Bow-wow!" said Joe.

"He must think he's a naggie or somethin' " said Uncle Keller.

"I'm the bark of this tree!" Joe yelled at them. Then he laughed a choked laugh under the handicap of his bonds. "So you don't like the bark of this tree? Well, I refuse to be the sap. Cut me loose from here."

"Take it easy, Joe."

"Cut me loose. I have an important engagement."

"You are right, Joe," said Donna. "The scientist will come here to see you this afternoon. He wishes to try certain foods—"

"I have a singing engagement," said Joe. "Ladies and gentlemen—*and* Uncle Jim Keller, please take your seats for the concert. The guest star of our afternoon program is none other than the renowned tenor, Joe Banker, of Bellrap, U. S. A. Applause, please. . . . Thank you."

Joe sang for two hours. His concert rambled from popular songs to classics and opera, and ended with the Star Spangled Banner.

Almost everyone in camp gathered around to listen.

He sang some quartet numbers, first announcing that, unfortunately, the other three members of the quartet could not be present. On one of these songs Uncle Keller found himself growing sentimental. The old Earth times seemed so far away and long ago. But when Uncle chimed in on a strain of the Old Oaken Bucket, the concert came to a dead stop, and Joe said, "Someone drop an apple on the bald-headed row and stop that snoring!"

The scientist decided to wait until Joe calmed down before trying to plan his diet. Donna urged the listeners from the camp to go back to their work.

"We will leave you now, Joe," she said "I will see you after you have rested. Uncle Keller will stay with you.

So Joe concluded his concert with the Star Spangled Banner, and to his satisfaction everyone stood attentively—not because they knew it was proper, but because the song thrilled them.

Soon Joe was alone with Uncle Keller.

"Ropes hurt you much, Joe?"

"Ropes insult me," said Joe. "I told them nothing but chains would hold me. I could break these ropes if I wanted to."

"Relax, Joe."

"Don't you believe it? I'll break them just to show you. Watch me."

"Relax! Relax! You'll skin yourself alive."

"Relax!" Joe mocked. "If you were full of fire like I am, you'd uproot this tree, and turn it into a battle-ram, and bust up the camp—Say, that's an idea!"

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Joe strained his muscles against his bonds.

"If I was you," Uncle Keller began. Then he shook his head, and mumbled, "Naw, you wouldn't listen."

HE SETTLED down against the foot of a tree and refused to look at Joe. He puffed calmly at his pipe.

"If you were me—what?" Joe was curious.

"I'd light a pipe an' have a good smoke and quiet my nerves."

"Give me your pipe," said Joe.

Uncle Keller rose slowly. "This naggie-wool makes a right good smoke," he said. "I reckon I can spare you a puff."

He put the pipe between Joe's teeth, and Joe smoked.

"It's awful," Joe said. "I don't see how you endure it. . . . Wait, not so fast. I didn't say I was through. Let me finish this pipeful."

When he finished, he said, "I'll be honest about it, Uncle Keller. That wasn't bad. Fill'er up again."

He smoked another pipeful, and another. Uncle Keller watched him suspiciously.

"I like it," said Joe. "It's good medicine."

Uncle Keller, tapping the pipe, paused to look Joe in the eye.

"You like it, huh? Maybe you ain't so crazy as I thought."

"I'm not crazy at all," said Joe.

"Son, you're as looney as a flea-bit flea."

"Not any more. I'm well."

"Since when?"

"Since I smoked that naggie wool."

## CHAPTER XXV

UNCLE KELLER thought he would have to swing his fists at two of the camp guards before they would agree to let him interrupt. The scientist and Ruffledeen were working up a new cake recipe.

Finally Uncle Keller succeeded in breaking in on the scientist's study, although he was almost too angry to talk. Fortunately, the scientist could understand his brand of English. But the news Uncle announced struck with a shock.

"How do you know he is cured?"

"Because he talks horse-sense, the same as me," said Uncle. "No baloney."

"What does he say?"

"Well, first he said that naggie-wool makes good smokin'—and that's as wise a statement as anyone could make. I don't figure a judge could improve on that."

"Go on."

"Well, next he began rememberin' things, hopin' he didn't do too much damage while he was off his nut."

"That is good," said the scientist. "What else?"

"Right away he was all hot and bothered for fear he'd chopped off Donna's horns. He was in a stew for me to send her around so he could be sure he hadn't —"

"Did you?"

"He said he'd go crazy if he didn't see her right away—and I didn't want that to happen—so—"

Donna and Joe appeared, silhouetted on the hilltop, coming down the trail arm in arm. Five minutes later Joe and Ruffledeen were joking over the tea party that they didn't have down in the bear trap. Fifteen minutes later, Joe's cuts and bruises were being treated. The guards prepared a bed for him and he was made to lie down and rest.

He fell asleep slowly. His overtaxed muscles and nerves gradually relaxed. He could hear the excited discussions over the merits of smoking naggie wool. He listened until he the scientist de-

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clare that Uncle Keller was the hero of the hour for his wonderful discovery.

"You have done what we scientists with all our formulas failed to do," said Axotello.

Uncle Keller said modestly, "It was a pleasure. I like to share my smokin'."

And Joe, smiling, fell asleep.

Later, he learned that Axotello's studies had found a scientific justification for the miraculous cure. The potent poison of orange-colored apples pepetrated through the skin of any man. But not through the wool of the naggie. (That beast was affected only when he ate some of the poison.)

Naggie wool was found to possess marvelous properties of poison resistance.

TWO days later, a multitude of horned Martians gathered at the edge of a village between the cliff and the river.

Uncle Keller and Joe went by taxi—the most exclusive taxi in the land—Donna Londeen's space ship. For by now the rumors had traveled far and wide that she was a flier of ships. She could no longer keep it a secret.

"Joe and I will just stay in the ship while you attend the meetings," said Uncle.

Donna laughed. "Since when have Bellrap citizens become so bashful. This may be your chance to 'Ring the Bell for Bellrap.' The people will want to see you."

"How well I remember," said Uncle Keller. "They want to make mince meat out of us for a lot of horn thievin' that Mercury bird got away with."

"Or did he get away with it?" Joe asked. Flashes of memory from his siege of madness kept tantalizing him. "It seems to me I combed someone's hair with that ray gun when I first went wild. I can't quite remember who."

"It was Judge Mobar," said Donna, "and your aim was perfect. Don't you remember what you did to him?"

"Did I—did I *change his color?*"

"His color and his shape," said Donna.

The facts began to dawn on Joe. A few minutes later he was standing on the cliff before one of the largest crowds of horned Martians ever assembled. Londeenoko stood beside him, addressing the crowd.

"I have the honor to present our guest from another planet, Joe Banker. He is the man who exposed the criminal who called himself Judge Mobar."

"Who, me?" Joe blushed with pleasure.

"As a token of our appreciation, we present you with the trophies of your good deed."

LONDEENOKO motioned to two attendants. They marched forward, bearing the gifts. Londeenoko took the head-and-shoulder harness containing the artificial horns.

"Here is the apparatus which the Black Cometeer used to disguise himself as one of us. There were several sets of these, used by his helpers. But this is the one he wore—the one which fell apart when Joe Banker fired a ray gun over his left ear."

"Who, me?" Joe began to grin.

"And this," said Londeenoko, taking from the hands of the other attendant a rubber mask marked with bright green squares, "is the false face which the Black Cometeer wore, with the official markings of a judge. The slit across the left temple is the result of the most excellent marksmanship on the part of Joe Banker."

"That's me." Joe smiled all over his face. He stole a glance at Donna. She was flushed with pleasure.

"These were the devices," Londeen-

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oko went on, "by which a desperado from Mercury carried out his acts of cruelty. When hundreds of you spearmen joined in a vast Ring of Death, he and his gang had no trouble in slipping through, pretending they were helping with the search. And yet, at that very moment, their ship, the Black Comet, was hidden only a short distance away, filled with stolen horns. That ship—"

Londeenoko drew a deep breath. His numerous grand-children in the crowd he noted, were watching him anxiously.

"That ship is to be left in my care, I am proud to say. I am sure my niece Donna will gladly teach me to operate it."

A chorus of shouts greeted this announcement. But from a certain undercurrent of whispers, Joe knew that it wouldn't be long before the old gentleman's grandchildren would take possession of the infamous Black Comet.

Before Londeenoko completed his speech, Joe learned new and startling things about the Mercury desperado. A few years earlier the Black Cometeer had undertaken his first piracy. Soon after his first visit to the apple forest, he had learned the value of the Martian's horns as a commercial product.

"He intended to raise *crops of horns* on Mercury," Londeenoko charged. "And for this purpose he kidnapped several newly married couples from our forest and took them back to Mars. He confessed this crime yesterday before he died from the numerous horn-punctures."

An audible hiss came up from the crowd.

"But I also learned, from his deathbed confession, that his kidnapping scheme turned out badly. The children who were born on Mercury to these horned couples *did not have horns.*"

"*Why not?*" Joe blurted. He almost jumped out of his shoes. Then his face went red, for everyone was staring at him, and they were amused. He began to back away.

At this moment the scientist walked forward, and Londeenoko beckoned to him.

"Here, my people, is the famous scientist of Venus, who may be able to explain the mystery of our horns."

After being duly presented and received, the handsome amber-eyed scientist began to shuffle through his papers. Something was missing. The last page of his conclusion on the horn theory was gone.

He looked around at the circle of guests assembled here above the crowd, and his penetrating gaze froze upon Uncle Keller.

Uncle, according to his habit, was totaling his expenses.

"What do you have there?" the scientist said.

"Huh?" said Uncle. "This is just an old scrap of paper I picked up with some foreign writin' on it. I was figurin' up a bill—"

"My document! Please!"

UNCLE gave up the valued paper without any fuss. He felt a glow of importance, as the scientist began reading. Beside him, Axloff, sitting with Donna's sister, gave him a smile and a wink.

" . . . and so, in view of the evidence," Axotello read, "one must conclude that all *human infants possess the capacity to grow horns.* If the environmental factors are favorable during infancy, the horns will develop. If not—"

"What on Earth is he saying?" Joe whispered.

"Nothing *on Earth.*" Donna replied.

The scientist held up the paper and gestured toward it as he commented.

"In other words, my friends of Apple Forest, the children born in this region

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will develop horns, whether the parents have horns or not. And children born in other lands do not develop horns, whether their parents have horns or not.

"Londeenoko has just told you of the horned couples who were kidnapped and taken to Mercury, whose children, born there, remain hornless. Let me add an illustration of my own:

"When my wife and I arrived on this planet for the first time, she was expecting a child within a few days. After the child was born, we discovered that it was developing horns, like any native of this realm. The shock led to my wife's death. I too was stunned. But now I understand that it was a natural and inevitable development. This apple-falling environment produces horns. And my son, Axloff, living among you, has been proud to possess his eleven horns.

"My theory is not complete," Axotello concluded. "I am not yet ready to prove that it is the result of a blue-apple diet for nursing mothers. I cannot prove that the perpetual sound of falling apples upon infant eardrums may not have an effect. I shall gladly devote my remaining days to the perfection of these theories . . ."

BEFORE the scientist had finished, the people of apple land were glowing with a collective pride. They were the only people in the world whom Nature had blessed with beautiful horns. They applauded the hornless scientist for his assurance.

Londeenoko now turned to Joe, and asked him to stand again before the crowd.

"Joe Banker, rumor has it that you came to our land to make a public presentation of a gift."

Joe, filled with a chestful of importance, gestured to Donna.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor, in behalf of the Chamber of Commerce of Bellrap, U. S. A., the Earth, to p r e s e n t—wait a minute! *Uncle Keller!*"

"Huh?"

"Where did we put that silver loving cup?"

"We? Don't ask me about that. I ain't seen it since the day of the Bellrap Parade."

Joe snapped his fingers. "By George and by Joe, I just now remembered where I left it. I was crawling over a feed rack in your barn, Uncle, and here was this space ship all lighted up. I laid the cup down and forgot to pick it up. I left it there in the hay."

"Well, by crackies!" Uncle Keller chuckled. "I'll bet the old hens is layin' eggs in it every day."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Joe called out, "the presentation of Donna Londeen's gift must be postponed, owing to a technical difficulty. I'll have to wait until I get back to the Earth—if I ever do—and I sure hope I do!"

The meeting ended, a few minutes later, and Joe turned to look for Donna. Where was she? Not with Axotello or Axloff. Not with her sister. Had she gone down to some of her friends in the crowd, or returned to her space ship alone?

He was detained by throngs of villagers who wanted to meet him as a friend and a hero. They were shaking his hands eagerly, and smiling at him. As soon as possible he broke away and hurried back to the ship.

Donna had left a note for him with one of the four guards stationed at the airlocks.

"Dear Joe: I did not know you were so anxious to go back to the Earth. I had hoped . . . but please take my ship and go. Never mind the silver cup. I will always remember that you meant well.—Donna."

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## CHAPTER XXVI

"*SHE'll always remember!*" he exclaimed. Then, to the guard, "Where is she? Which way did she go?"

"She has given you your order," the guard snapped. "She said you knew enough about the ship to run it. Get in and go."

The guard started to usher him in.

"Stop it! I'm not going!"

"Yes you are!" The big guard glared down at him. Two others lowered their heads to press their horns against his ribs, forced him into the air locks.

He was on the verge of swinging his fists. "By George, you won't get away with this. I'm not going—"

"She said you were eager to return," the big guard growled.

"But not without her," Joe snapped. "When I go it'll be on a honeymoon, and I'm gonna tell her so. Now let me out or I'll—"

"Joe!" It was the soft voice of Donna, calling from inside the ship.

"Donna! What's the gag?"

"Joe, I only wanted to hear that—that word—*honeymoon.*"

For a moment Joe was speechless. He began to smile. Donna came to him, took his hand in both of hers. With a nod, she dismissed the guards. They sauntered away, chuckling.

"You still want to marry me, Joe—horns and all?"

"I love your horns," he breathed. "I can hardly wait till you march in the Easter parade back home in Bellrap. You'll be the queen of them all."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. He was still holding her when they heard limping steps approaching from somewhere outside the ship.

"It's Uncle Keller," said Joe. He'll be here in a minute."

"Joe, when we are married—"

"Yes, Donna?"

"We will have children?"

"Yes, dear."

"I wonder—shall they be born on Earth, or here in the Apple Forest?"

Joe smiled and shook her by the shoulders and then by the shoulder-horns. "Maybe some of each, dear. We'll discuss that later."

Uncle Keller, limping up the steps into the ship, seemed to be in a great hurry.

"Donna! Joe! Can you taxi me back to Earth for a couple o' weeks? I gotta lotta work to attend to."

"What kind of work?" said Joe.

"Orders to fill. I'm in business! Gonna bring civilization to this apple forest! Won't Bellrap be proud of me?"

"And your wife, too," said Donna. "What is this new business?"

"Corncob pipes. I already got seventeen hundred orders."

## LUCK FINDS THE X-RAY

DR. WILHELM VON ROENTGEN, a German physicist, was hard at work in his laboratory one day, performing some experiments with a Crooke's vacuum tube. Absorbed in the results he was getting, Roentgen absent-mindedly toyed with a metal key. Then, Roentgen dropped the key on his hardwood desk as he turned the switch to shoot twenty thousand volts through the tube. The tube began to glow, radiating a greenish phosphorence.

Shortly after completing these experiments, Roentgen developed some photographic plates which had been stored in one of the desk drawers. Slightly annoyed, he noticed that one of the plates had been ruined. Clearly showing upon it, was the imprint of a key. The doctor's initial amazement over, his annoyance turned to joy, as he tried to find an explanation for this event. Then, his eyes lighted on the key reposing on the desk. The keen mind of the physicist quickly put two and two together, deducing that rays from the tube had penetrated the desk, printing on the plate.

From this accidental occurrence, came the birth of the X-rays. Soon, the medical profession was being revolutionized by the rays which could penetrate the body and take photographs of the inside of the human being.—*Gary Lee Horton.*

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# Christopher Crissom's Cravat

## By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

IN A happier broadway era, Christopher Crissom had been acclaimed "The Greatest Lover Since Casanova." It was unfortunate, however, for the state of Christopher Crissom's amours, not to mention his earning power, that that happy era was long since gone.

At fifty, in a none too clean boarding house on New York's lower East Side, Crissom faced the cracked, soapy surface of his dresser mirror, one sunny spring afternoon, and at last gave in to the facts.

"I look," mused the once renowned idol of the footlights, "a trifle used."

This, of course, was understatement. Crissom was merely softening the blow for himself. He looked, more exactly, like hell.

There was, of course, his classic profile. Something of its former grandeur remained. But it sagged, and the throat of his skin hung limply in relief. His face was gaunt, of course. Intermittent hunger invariably brings with it a certain gauntness. And age had done the rest. His still neatly trimmed moustache was gray, as was his fast disappearing hair. And the blue-black pouches beneath his sad and soulful eyes were something which the artifice



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**Christopher Crissom was the greatest lover since Casanova, but right now he had a tie which was as unromantic as mud**

"But I don't want a tie! Now will you please get the blue blazes out of here?"



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of cosmetics could nevermore erase.

Cristopher Crissom, at long last, was finally, completely, aware of these dreary facts. He knew now that his long cherished dream of romantic roles such as he had played in his heyday were futile. And he now knew why it was that he had been lucky to get what small bit parts as had fallen his way during the past fifteen meager years.

It had taken a long time for Christopher Crissom to travel this road to ultimate self appraisal.

And now the end of the journey left him weary.

He turned from his betraying mirror and walked slowly over to the ugly brass bed. There he sat down, his head in his hands, and thought of nothing.

Christopher Crissom had come to the end of the road, and it is significant that he was too tired even to muster a trace of ham with which to bolster his beaten spirits.

Outside his dirty window, New York was fresh with spring. The sun was bright, the air warm, the breeze scented with that delightful aroma which belongs only to April. The sound of the hurdy-gurdy sang the season, as did the sounds of children's skates upon the pavements and the noise of a baseball game under way among the street corner urchins.

But Christopher Crissom didn't care.

After a few moments, Crissom rose, went to the window, and stared out of it into the street below. He saw the hurdy-gurdy, felt the warmth of the sun through the dirty window pane, watched the children skating, the urchins at play. He sighed, and nostalgia ached in his heart.

Crissom left the window, after a bit, and opened the door of his dingy closet. Wryly he surveyed the clean but ragged wardrobe of some three very outdated suits that hung there.

He chose the old tweed, as it was light, and had once been gay in keeping with the spirit of spring. In his dresser drawer he found a shirt that was not too badly frayed at the collar and cuffs. And on the rack beside the dresser he found a tie—a tired, badly bedraggled tie whose faded once-jaunty pattern brought him renewed pain and heartache.

It was, however, the only tie of the five or six he owned, that at all blended with the rest of the costume he had chosen.

Crissom then began to dress.

The care he gave to his toilet was somewhat remarkable. And by the time he was completely attired in the costume he had selected, he looked almost—but of course not quite—well turned out.

The gray fedora he found to top his outfit had once been sleek and soft and obviously expensive. Now it was worn, almost nap-bare, and the jaunty manner in which Crissom snapped the brim down on both ends was somehow pathetic. The hat was, nevertheless, quite clean, and had even been recently blocked.

Christopher Crissom then left his dirty little room in his drab little boarding house and became a part of the New York pedestrian horde.

HE WALKED slowly and without any particular purpose, pausing often to gape at passing sights or stare in faintly interesting store windows. His progress was steady, leisurely, unhurried.

Purposely, Crissom by-passed the theatrical section of the City. It was not his intent to tour the haunted canyons of his triumphant youth. It was not his intent in fact, to relive anything of his past, in this stroll, save the springs of yesterday and the memories

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that were aromatically a part of them.

There was a little cafe in the eighties. Old now, and tired like Crissom himself. He remembered that there had been fine wine there once, and gaiety, and a lovely, laughing girl. Her hair had been golden, and the adoration in her beautiful eyes had been solely for the debonair, the handsome, the famous young Christopher Crissom.

Crissom smiled faintly at the memory of this. He could recall the evening, the music, almost the menu. But he could not recall the name of the girl.

There had been many such beautiful women in Christopher Crissom's life, then. And all of them had been as adoring as the golden-haired girl whose face he now remembered. All of them, he felt he could truthfully say, had loved him. But each of them had to content herself with Crissom's smile, his charm, his handsome manliness, but not his heart.

Christopher Crissom had never truly loved a woman. He had wooed them and wined them, even married some. But each had been nothing but a time interval by which he numbered the swiftly moving years of his dizzying success. He had never been able to find room in his heart for anyone other than himself.

When Crissom stopped at last in the Park, he found a small bench beneath the trees where the sun could warm his back.

He watched the nurses stroll by pushing their perambulators, listened to the shouts of little boys and girls at play, and blinked lazily in the warm sunlight.

Leisurely Crissom continued to take stock of himself, his past, and his present.

He was in the life stage of what should have been virile middle age. By years, he was not old. Fifty was certainly not the chronological definition of age.

And yet he was an old man.

He realized, vaguely, that this was due to nothing more than the fact that his life had been based on youth, his success dependent on it, his career a constant struggle to keep a pretense of it. Had he not struggled so desperately to retain youth, he would not have become so suddenly and utterly aged when he was at last bested in the hopeless fight.

He had made Youth his god, worldly beauty his shrine, and when both had left him, there had been nothing to save him.

Crissom watched a boy of sixteen or so wheeling his bicycle along the walk. Something seized his heart, and it was worse than the ache of envy. He realized, then, that there was no price he would not pay to have his youth again.

A moment later, two lovers strolled by, hand in hand, raptly lost in one another. The look in the girl's eye as she stared up at the young man whose arm she clung to, was the same that had once been directed at Christopher Crissom.

Crissom was aware, when they had passed, that he would sell his soul to have a woman look at him with such utter adoration once again.

QUITE suddenly bitterness filled him, and he was swept by a desolate loneliness that made him want to cry out his resentment at life. He was lonely for youth, not for companionship. He was lonely for the love someone might give him, not the love he might give someone else. And he was suddenly deeply resentful at the fate which had deprived Christopher Crissom of both youth and love.

He asked himself why it was that he could not have bargained with fate. Why it was that, since he was such an admirable standard bearer for youth, and had

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been such an excellent recipient to the love of others, he could not have been permitted to remain perpetually young, perpetually desirable.

Youth had been a role to Crissom. He had played it handsomely and to its full. Why, then, had he not been permitted to play that role eternally, rather than have it taken over by those who played it less lavishly than he?

Crissom could have wept his bitterness. He put his head in his hands, leaning forward on the bench, staring dully at the sidewalk. . . .

"Some ties, mister?"

Crissom saw, first, a pair of feet. They were small feet, a man's feet. The shoes that covered them were cheap and scuffed. Crissom looked up and saw the owner of those feet, the man who had said once, and was now repeating:

"Some ties, mister?"

Crissom saw a thin, smiling little man, dressed in a cheap, unpressed suit of blue serge that fitted him too tightly. The fellow had sad, somber eyes, in spite of his flashing, crooked-toothed smile. His complexion was of Mediterranian swarthiness.

He was carrying a cardboard box, shirt or dress variety, in which there was an almost blinding array of loudly colored ties.

"They're very fine ties. I make them all by hand. Myself, I make them. They are inexpensive," said the little man.

Crissom regarded the fellow with lofty disdain for an instant, then realized that the little man's eyes were fixed on Crissom's own frayed and faded cravat.

Crissom flushed under this open scrutiny, trying to think of a sharp remark to send the little peddler on his way.

"You have good taste in ties, mister," said the little man apologetically. "That one you wear now. It is old. It no longer looks well. But it was an excellent tie, an expensive tie, when you bought it."

"Thank you," Crissom said acidly.

His bitterness was apparently lost on the little man.

"I know good ties," said the peddler. "I have made all kinds." He sighed, and glanced at those in his box. "These I was just going to sell you—they are not good. They are cheap. They are loud. But, just a minute."

Christopher Crissom watched, somewhat surprised, as the little man put the box in his arms to the ground. He was even more surprised when, stooping over, the peddler removed the top layer of the box and exposed an under section which contained half a dozen magnificent cravats.

At Crissom's involuntary gasp, the little peddler looked up and smiled.

"They are beautiful, are they not?" he asked.

Crissom nodded. "I'll admit they are," he said, wetting his lips. "But I am afraid that I am not in the market for any cravats, good or bad, at the mo—"

The little man interrupted Crissom.

"This is particularly suited to you," he said, selecting a soft, silken, gray blue cravat.

Before Crissom was aware of the peddler's intent, the little man was holding the necktie up to him, smiling happily.

"See," the peddler exclaimed. "See how it suits you!"

CRISSOM suddenly felt angry towards this little man who taunted him with finery he could obviously ill afford.

"I say," he exclaimed indignantly. "Enough of this high-pressure business. I told you I don't want any neckwear. If you will kindly—"

Again the little man cut him off. As

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he removed the tie from Crissom's neck, where he had been holding it, he said: "It is the price that worries you, no?"

"Damn you!" Crissom exploded. "Will your next cheap trick be to try to shame me into a purchase? I told you I don't want any."

The little man nodded soberly.

"I see. It is the price. But you need not be ashamed of that. Nor need you feel that you cannot afford this cravat. To you I am making it a gift."

Crissom obviously did not understand. His tone was acid as he said: "A gift, eh? And what trickery have you in mind? Must I buy seven others to get this one as a gift?"

The little man's smile, this time, was hurt.

"You must buy nothing," he said softly. "I see that you know fine neckwear. I see that your own once excellent cravat is worn and threadbare. When you could afford to, you bought the best cravats. You gave to some other tie salesman understanding consideration as a buyer. Why then, in appreciation of this, may not I, a lowly peddler of cheap cravats, give you the very best of my stock, gratis?"

Crissom felt a trifle sorry for his outburst of temper.

"You mean you actually want to make me a present of that very lovely tie?" he asked.

"Yes," the peddler declared.

"No strings, no hitches?" Crissom demanded.

"Only one," said the peddler.

"Ahhh," smiled Crissom. "Now, perhaps we'll get to the bottom of this. What is the hitch?"

"The provision is," said the little man, "that you give me the old tie you are now wearing, in exchange."

"Are you serious?" Crissom was now amused.

"I would like to have it," said the peddler.

It occurred, wistfully, to Christopher Crissom, that perhaps this peddler had recognized him as the once celebrated theatrical star. Perhaps that was why he wanted his tie. A souvenir, something to show to friends and boast about. A tie worn by that once famous actor, Christopher Crissom.

Crissom gave voice to this wishful thinking.

"You know, then, who I am?" he demanded hopefully.

The little peddler smiled a sad, shy smile. He shook his head.

"I do not know your name," he said. "I know only that you are the person I was destined to meet here this afternoon. You are the person destined to wear this cravat."

Christopher Crissom's ego was suddenly deflated. What on earth was the little fellow babbling about? He frowned, then brightened. It really made no difference. There was nothing to quibble about. After all, the little idiot was willing to give him an obviously expensive cravat in exchange of Crissom's own threadbare neckpiece. There was certainly nothing to lose in an exchange like that. Looking at the new, luxuriously silken blue gray tie in the little fellow's hands, Crissom was suddenly eager to have it.

"Thanks, old boy," he said. "That was really awfully decent of you. I shall surely hold to the trade."

Crissom swiftly removed his own necktie and handed it to the little man. The peddler, smiling happily, handed him the new cravat.

THE moment Crissom felt the silken texture of the tie in his hand, an electric thrill went through him. It was even more soft, more luxuriant material than it appeared to be. It was a tie such as would have been a prize to him even

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in his heydey.

Crissom realized, foolishly, that his hands trembled as he fondled the neckpiece. He flushed in embarrassment as he realizd that this was apparent to the little peddler.

"It's wonderful," Crissom blurted, covering his confusion. "Quite a magnificent bit of wearing apparel.

"It is more than that," said the little fellow. "I know. I made it myself. Wearing that tie, you will be three times blessed. It will thrice give you what you prize most highly in life. Your three greatest wishes will be fulfilled."

Crissom had been eagerly donning the cravat as the little peddler spoke. He paused in the middle of the intricacies of a Windsor knot, and glanced sharply at the little fellow. Really potty, Crissom thought. But he said:

"Really? Is that right? My, rather startling tie, eh?"

The little man smiled.

"You do not believe me," he said without offense.

Crissom tried to conceal a smile. He finished the knot, patted it smooth, tucked the ends of the tie beneath his coat.

"Why, of course I do," he said. "And I certainly thank you for that handsome cravat. Even with just its ordinary qualities, such as excellence of fabric, beauty of pattern, craftsmanship of work, it is worth a thousand thanks."

The little man still seemed unoffended.

"No," he smiled. "I know you do not take credence in what I have told you. However, you will learn quickly enough that it is true."

Crissom watched the little man as he folded the actor's old, threadbare cravat and stuffed it in the under section of the tie box. As he watched, he unconsciously stroked the smoothly silken texture of his new neckpiece. He regretted that there was no mirror present.

The little peddler had put the top on his tie box, placed it in his arms once more, and was now bowing an exit.

"The tie looks splendid," he said. "It has found an excellent owner. Remember what I have told you about it. Good day."

Crissom was inwardly glad to be rid of the peddler. He had the tie, and that was all that interested him. The zaney mumblings of a man slightly deranged were embarrassing and hard to cope with. Crissom was glad to see the little man moving off.

"Good day, old chap," Crissom called, "and thanks a million for the handsome cravat."

Already ten yards or so down the walk, the little man looked over his shoulder, smiled, and waved once to Crissom. Then he turned and moved on. A moment later, and he was lost from view around a corner of the park walk.

Crissom sat there, staring at the turn around which the little peddler had disappeared. He was still unconsciously fondling the smooth gloss fabric of his new neckpiece.

He smiled.

"Balmy, absolutely balmy," Crimson murmured. "As nutty as they come. However," he sighed, "such insanity as that is pleasant to encounter these days. One finds so little of it. Three wishes, eh? What rot! But what a fine cravat!"

CRISSOM sat there a moment more, basking in the sun and feeling, with this new possession, considerably better than he had felt before. Better, in fact, than he had felt in quite a long time.

The spring was still fevering in his

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veins. Each breath of it continued to remind him of other, younger, and happier days in spring. The girls—ah, the beautiful girls! And the adoration in their eyes—that was what made it all worth while.

Crissom sighed, trying to recall how many years it had been since a woman, any woman, had looked at him like that. It had been so long ago that the memory was hazy.

Oh so desperately he wished he could see that look again! If once more some girl, some woman, howsoever plain, could look into his eyes with the tenderness and love which he had once received from them all.

He shook his head wearily, knowing what a ridiculous hope that was. Crissom rose from the bench and started along the walk in the direction the peddler had taken minutes before.

As he turned the corner, his glance fell upon a purse that lay on a park bench by the side of the walk.

Crissom stepped quickly over to it, looked around, and perceived that there was no one about. Whoever had left this purse here was not in the vicinity. Carelessness that might profit the badly depleted Crissom pocketbook.

He looked once again to left and right, then over his shoulder. There was no one within sight. He bent forward and picked up the purse.

His hands trembled as they held it. Wild hope made him pray that there might be fifty, even a hundred, dollars in it. But it didn't seem the sort of purse that would contain that much. It was plain, almost drab.

Crissom was about to open it when he heard the feminine voice behind him.

"Oh, thank goodness it's still here!"

He wheeled, purse in his hands, and saw a short, plump, somewhat matronly woman bearing down on him. She was visibly excited, quite distraught.

An automatic smile, a gracious smile, came to Crissom's lips.

"This is yours, Madam?" he asked the woman.

She stood before him now, and Crissom saw that her hair was dark, her dress black, her hat ridiculously small for one with such a round face as hers. Nonetheless, he saw that she had a certain wholesome, rotund prettiness about her. More exactly—she had once possessed such a prettiness, but carried now only the traces of it.

As Crissom spoke, smiling graciously, he extended the purse to the woman.

She took it from his hand, her blue eyes meeting his for the first time.

"Thank you so much!" she exclaimed.

Crissom continued to smile. He bowed from the hips.

"Not at all, my dear lady. I had just spied your purse. I was about to open it, thinking the owner's address might be inside. Now your return has saved us both worry."

The woman seemed to be aware of Crissom as a person for the first time. She crimsoned beneath his courtly smile, but her eyes, after appraising him quickly, returned to his.

And Crissom saw the expression in her eyes as they met his own.

It was an expression of stark, unabashed admiration. A look, almost, of one smitten by love and filled with adoration!

CRISSOM'S pulse doubled its beat. No woman had looked at him in such a manner in years!

"You are so very, very kind," she said. Her eyes left his, and she seemed suddenly flustered and dreadfully embarrassed at what she had permitted him to read in that glance.

Crissom, however, scarcely noticed this. He was too utterly elated to

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guide himself by anything other than his old, and once unfailing, instincts. He was playing a response to the glance she had given him. Playing it to the hilt, even if, perhaps, a bit too eagerly.

Into his voice, into his manner, into his smile he threw the long languishing chemicals that had once been the fabulous Crissom Personality. That had made him an idol of women.

"Not at all," he murmured throatily. "It is always a delight to be able to serve a charming lady."

The plump, matronly little woman almost swooned at this. Into her eye again leaped the unmistakable mirrorings of a woman swept off her feet and hopelessly entranced.

The reaction set off the last fuse in the long slumbering Crissom ego. Quickly he tabulated the change he had in his pocket—a dollar and fifty-three cents—all he had in the world. He swallowed hard. What was a dollar and fifty-three cents against this look that nothing on earth could have bought before this wonderful moment? He couldn't lose his admirer now. He had to keep her with him a little longer. He had to savor the last full measure of her utterly breathtaking reaction to him.

Crissom took a deep breath and threw away his reason in his next words.

"Dear lady," he murmured. "I hope you won't think me dreadfully forward if I suggest that this fortunate moment be celebrated in—ah—a cocktail?"

He didn't need her answer, which came a second later. He saw it clearly in the unashamed adoration that shone in her blue eyes.

THE three hours they spent together in the inexpensive little bar Crissom had chosen were the most glorious he had had in the past decade. Over their cocktails—Crissom had one, which he nursed carefully, and the woman had two, which she considered daring—Crissom talked endlessly on the subject which most fascinated him, Christopher Crissom.

"I knew I had seen you before," she said, when he had given her his name. "My mother took me to several of your plays when I was home for the holidays from finishing school."

Crissom had been scarcely able to stand this. It had been a good dozen years since he had been "recognized" by his "public".

He made it plain, in his casual discussion of the theater in relation to the Life and Times of Christopher Crissom, that his present status as an idol of the footlights was something far from small. A gentleman in quiet retirement was the picture he painted of himself. The minor roles he played now and then—they were all just roguish impulses or appearances, to satisfy the urgings of producer friends who begged him to lend a hand by a brief appearance on their bills. He was contemplating, he went on to assure his companion, a return to the stage in all his former glory.

His companion—her name was Alice Hoobin—was visibly thrilled by all of this, and the ardor in her gaze became so marked that it would have embarrassed one less starved for such attention than Crissom.

At the conclusion of it all, Crissom, glancing at the clock on the wall, observed that he felt like an utter fool for having bored her by his incessant talk of himself. He wanted so much, he assured her, to know more about her.

Alice Hoobin blushed prettily, and took her eyes from his.

"I—I'm really no one at all," she said. "There's nothing to tell of my life. And you've been so utterly fascinating, Mr. Crissom—".

Crissom had a moment of largess. He cut in,

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"You may call me Christopher, if you wish," he said.

Alice was overwhelmed. Tears came to her eyes.

"Christopher," she quavered, "this has been incredibly delightful. I can't recall such an afternoon in my entire life."

"My dear Alice," said Crissom kindly, "it has been every bit as pleasant for me."

And he was pleased to note that his using her first name for the first time that afternoon sent her into a near swoon.

"I wish I had time to see you home," he added, beckoning a bored waiter for the check.

"But that isn't at all necessary," Alice Hoobin declared. "In fact, I was wondering if I'd be too bold to ask you if I might drop you off at your place. You see, my car is scarcely a block from here. I told John—he's the chauffeur—to wait while I went back to get my purse. The poor thing's probably wondered what on earth has become of me."

The mention of a car with chauffeur caught Crissom like a blow in the solar plexis. Clearly there was more to this Alice Hoobin than met the eye. His reaction of surprise must have been noticed by the woman.

"Yes, you see," she said hastily, "I go to the park almost every afternoon. I have my chauffeur drive me there and wait for me. You probably think it a silly way to pass dull afternoons."

Crissom smiled mechanically; made a mechanical answer.

"Not at all," he murmured.

But he was thinking of the remark she had made about finishing school, and adding it to this startling information about car and chauffeur. Could this drab little thing be a woman of wealth. Crissom took a swift and sudden stock of her apparel, realized, with a shock, that—though it was all terribly plain—it was all exceedingly expensive attire.

THE waiter brought the check, a dollar-twenty, Crissom almost lost his mind at the thought of parting with all but a few pennies of his meager bankroll in order to stand cocktails for this girl of obvious wealth. Nonetheless, the look in her eyes was still worth every bit of it. He paid the check with a flourish, and winced only slightly as he tipped the waiter his last thirty cents.

"But you haven't said if I may drop you at your place," Alice Hoobin reminded him.

Crissom had a vision of the girl's face if she saw the hovel in which he lived. He started to think of some plausible excuse. But she broke in on his search.

"I am going to insist," she said coyly, "that you let me run you home."

Crissom knew he would have to let her run him somewhere. He thought of an excellent stunt.

"I was going to stop in at the Lambs Club," he said. "I have a dinner engagement with several good friends of mine, producers. You could drop me there, if you like."

Alice Hoobin, stars in her eyes, said that would be more than wonderful. Crissom taking a deep breath, realized he had made a neat out. He could step out at the door, and when the car moved off, he could lose himself in the crowd moving along the street. That way she would never know that he hadn't kept his fictitious appointment with his casually mentioned and non existent producer friends.

His plan worked to perfection. The mention of the Lambs Club was additional honey to Alice Hoobin. Crissom could see her turning the glamorous and romantic name over and over again

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in her mind.

He smiled. Never had he had such a responsive audience to his ham. Never, at least, in quite a number of years. . .

THE car and chauffeur which Alice Hoobin had mentioned so casually, turned out to be a long, sleek, limousine and a liveried, white-haired man who was obviously an Old Family Retainer.

As Crissom settled back on the soft upholstery he turned and gave his most unctious smile to his companion.

"You are indeed kind, Alice," he declared. "With shortages as they are from the war, I've not had my limousine out of storage in months. Cabs are such a bore—and difficult to get these days, too."

"I use the car so seldom," Alice said, "that I find my gas ration is more than sufficient for my daily trips to the park."

A speculative gleam was coming into Crissom's eye.

"You visit the park every afternoon?"

Alice nodded.

"At the same time?"

Again she nodded.

"And at the same place?"

Alice Hoobin blushed at the inference in his questions. Clearly, as she mopped her brow with a handkerchief, the thought of having another meeting with Christopher Crissom was almost more than she could bear.

Crissom carefully noted this, and, just as carefully, changed the subject back to anecdotes about Christopher Crissom and the American theater. In this fashion he held forth until the limousine rolled up before the Lambs Club entrance.

Crissom was full of profusive apologies for having forced his friend to go out of her way in carrying him to his destination. She, of course, oozed protestations that it was a pleasure. They both smiled warmly, and Crissom held her hand a moment longer than necessary in parting.

As the limousine moved off, Crissom turned, made as if to enter the club, then blended himself skillfully into the pedestrians moving along the walk. He was certain, as he watched the car fade into the stream of traffic, that Alice Hoobin hadn't looked back to see the deception that had been played on her.

Crissom slowed his pace, suddenly feeling the let-down that was bound to have come after losing his audience. His momentary depression was given additional gloom by the realization that he was now absolutely penniless, and extremely hungry.

He felt exceedingly, overwhelmingly bitter. And his bitterness was directed against the cruel fate that showed him happiness then whisked it from his grasp.

Why, he demanded of himself, had chance introduced him to this creature who could satisfy his craving for adoration, yet left him without the wherewithall that would enable him to pursue her beyond this first meeting?

Why, too, had fate tossed him a double mockery—a glimpse at adoration he could not keep, and wealth he could not have? He had once had adoration; he had once had wealth. Now fate showed both to him briefly, in a flickering moment, only to pull them beyond his reach. It was not right. It was not just. It was not fair.

It occurred to Crissom, suddenly, that in Alice Hoobin he had seen a glimpse of an unobtainable paradise. Why, being as obviously smitten by him as she was, it would be no trick at all for him to win her and marry her. Winning and marrying that girl—woman might have been a better word—would give him both the adoration he had

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been so long starved for, plus the wealth and leisure which he had long considered his deserved, though denied heritage.

This did not add to Crissom's peace of mind.

Knowing now that both adoration and riches lay within his grasp, save for the circumstances of chance which would deny both to him, he was trebly bitter.

If he had money at all. Just a little money. Just enough money to enable him to finance a week's campaign to win Alice Hoobin, he knew it would be no trick. Then all that he had dreamed of someday regaining would be his.

But he was penniless. He could never attempt to carry on his hollow act with the girl under his present financial circumstances.

"Crissom, you old recluse!"

THE voice broke in on his moody contemplation at the same time that the owner of the voice seized him by the arm.

Crissom looked up to see John Garret, the theatrical agent. Garret was a tall, well-dressed chap with graying hair and an amiable mein. In the past he had handled Crissom in the days after his fall from fame.

"Oh, I say. I didn't see you, old man," Crissom said. His voice and expression brightened automatically, professionally. One never knew but what an agent might have a part, however small, to hand out.

"I've been meaning to get in touch with you, Christopher," said Garret.

"Someone casting for a new show?" Crissom asked, filled with a wild hope.

Garret shook his head. "Not that. No. There doesn't seem to be anything doing in character bits these days, Christopher. However, I do have news for you, and it isn't too bad at all."

Crissom could scarcely stand the suspense, but he fought to keep a poker face.

"Really, what is it?"

"Remember *Hattie Goes Home?*" Garret asked.

Crissom remembered the play well. He had had a character bit in the stinker well over three years ago. It had closed after three weeks, and the producers were in debt to the entire cast in back salary and rehearsal pay.

He nodded noncommittally.

"Well," said Garret, fishing into his pocket, "John Fallow, who produced the flop, is coming out with another show. His first since that failure. He is paying up all the back money owed the cast of *Hattie Goes Home,* in order to get a fresh start with this venture. His checks just came into my office today, as I handled two-thirds of his cast in that stinker. I have yours, old boy, right in my pocket. I was just going to mail it."

Christopher Crissom's hands trembled as he reached forward to take the check. It was all he could do to keep his expression from going to pieces.

"Thanks, old boy," said Crissom in a shaky effort to be jaunty. "A bit of extra cash never hurts any of us."

"Not at all," Garret agreed. "Well, old man. Drop up some day. Maybe we'll have something right up your alley in characterizations."

Christopher Crissom was not sure whether he bade Garret goodbye or not. He only knew that he was holding that precious white envelope in his hands, unmindful of the crowds that passed. He was scarcely able to control his fingers when he tore the edge from the envelope and reached inside it for the check.

He stared wordlessly at it, blinking his eyes, then closing them fast for a minute before opening them again. It

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was for the full back pay that had been owed him—three hundred and twenty dollars!

Christopher Crissom had not seen that much money in one lump since—since—since— He couldn't remember how long. Years, not months, that much was certain.

He was suddenly, blissfully aware that he now had fortune within his grasp. With three hundred and twenty dollars, and shrewd management, he could give Alice Hoobin a whirlwind courtship that would win her in seven days or less.

Pedestrians were startled at the joyous whoop emitted by the middle-aged man with the envelope in his hands....

THE first purchase made by Crissom was a new suit of tweeds. He found a number within his budget for eighty dollars. Shirts, six of them, were twenty dollars more. Shoes followed, and socks. The basic elements of his attire he left unchanged. After all, he didn't intend to carry on his courtship in his underwear. If it were ragged, who was to know? He had now spent twenty dollars more, and was left with two hundred dollars of his original windfall. On that, he figured, he could operate.

He stopped at a bar, wearing the suit and shoes and one of the shirts he had just purchased. With the rest of his newly acquired possessions packaged in his arms, he ordered a double scotch and water.

Then he toasted to the success of his venture.

"Here's wishing I make it," said Christopher Crissom, "every single dollar of the fortune I'm after."

As he raised his glass he had his first chance to see himself in his new attire. He looked, he admitted ungrudgingly, one hundred percent improved. The figure staring back at him from the mirror behind the bar was the same gentleman that Crissom had been some two hours before. But he was certainly dressed differently—except for the quite obviously exquisite cravat.

Crissom smiled fondly at the cravat. The crazy little beggar who had given it to him might have been as loony as he appeared. But, no doubt about it, the cravat had brought him luck of sorts. After all, it was right after donning it that he'd encountered Alice. And it was while he was still wearing it that he encountered Garret and the windfall.

Crissom lefted his glass once more.

"I repeat," he said. "Here's wishing me luck in my fortune hunting."

It occurred to him, then, that he had been desperately wishing to find, once again, adoration from the other species when Alice appeared ready to give him just that.

"Silly thought," Crissom declared aloud. "Damned coincidental thing, though."

He smiled again, ordered another drink, downed it, and started back to his dingy apartment on the lower East Side.

On the following day, Christopher Crissom met Alice Hoobin in the park. The time and place were the same as on their previous meeting. But Christopher Crissom and Alice Hoobin were both very much more in earnest over the roles they played to one another. Crissom's courtliness, charm, gallantry and sex appeal were laid on as if by a trowel, and Alice's response in loving adoration was consequently even more pronounced.

In the evening, Crissom took her dining and dancing in a small, smart, but comparatively inexpensive night club. He liked its charm, he told her, and privacy. He didn't add, however, that it kept expenses down.

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In the morning, the following day, Crissom sent Alice Hoobin a single rose, beautiful, fragile, exquisite. By the dozen, roses of this sort were exceedingly expensive. One, however, cost little. And wrapped, as this rose was, in a piece of black velvet, the entire effect was original, and more strikingly dramatic than two dozen of them.

In the afternoon, that day, Crissom took Alice for a ride through the park in a hansom. Cocktails followed, then dinner, and his first chance to see her elegant Park Avenue home when she invited him back there for a night cap.

THE moment Crissom saw the home, he had an estimate of the money the Hoobin woman was worth. It must have been a staggering sum. He learned, too, as they talked that evening in the drawing room of that venerable mansion, some details of her life that she had not previously brought forward.

She was the spinster daughter of a millionaire who had died four years previously. She had no brothers, no sisters, and her mother had died more than ten years ago. There were no uncles or aunts to lay claim to a share of her fortune. The estate was handled by an executor who represented the bank which held her money. She had, however, full control of her finances at any time she wished to exercise it.

She had been, until meeting Christopher Crissom, utterly, desolately lonely.

On the second morning of their courtship, Crissom again sent a rose. He met her that afternoon in the park, walked hand in hand with her through the zoo, where they threw peanuts to the animals, and in the evening took her to the Stork Club.

The procedure varied somewhat each succeeding day, save for the rose in the morning and the afternoon meeting in the park. And there was no doubt in the world in Crissom's mind but what he was making sure-fire progress.

On the terrace of a penthouse cafe, the night of the seventh day of the courtship, Christopher Crissom asked Alice Hoobin to share his worldly goods and his future.

In her eager acceptance, she almost knocked him over the terrace railing. But Christopher Crissom didn't mind. So long as it was almost.

Seven hours later Christopher Crissom and Alice Hoobin stood before a justice of the peace in a small town in Maryland. They had driven there at breakneck speed in her limousine, Crissom at the wheel.

After the justice had pronounced Miss Hoobin Mrs. Crissom, her spouse smilingly asked her for the money for the fee. He had come to the last of his three hundred and twenty dollar investment money. Now he was traveling on her. . . .

AFTER the first newspaper clamors caused by the elopement of the heiress and the ex-great ham actor, Christopher Crissom and bride settled down to the existence of his choosing.

They lived in the old family mansion of Alice's, chiefly because Crissom found it to his liking to be surrounded with the rich trappings and dignity of antiquity.

Bit by bit Crissom picked up the remaining threads of his old life. Those former associates and acquaintances of his who were still about and—which was important to Crissom—doing well, were invited to small parties where he permitted them to share in his newly won luxury.

Slowly but definitely the parties grew larger, the circle of acquaintances newer and more prosperous, and the talk of the gay affairs louder and more preva-

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lent around the town.

The Christopher Crissom's invitation list included all the theatrical and newspaper and operatic celebrities available, not to mention a large assortment of frank and charming parasites. And it was typical that the manner of Crissom's climb back to affluence, although remarked on for the first months after the wedding, soon became forgotten. It became more or less taken for granted that the wealth Crissom displayed was his own. After all, he had made a million, or close to it, in his prime. And as long as the champagne and caviar proved to be plentiful, memories remained short.

Christopher Crissom was, indeed, almost back in the days of his glory. However, there were several things that made his near paradise not quite what it should have been.

The first of these was his wife, Alice.

Somehow, she was beginning to be a vast source of ever growing irritation to him.

This was not due to the fact that she adored him less. In truth, her adoration multiplied each hour, day, week, and month until it knew almost no bounds. At his gay parties she was constantly at his side, looking on worshipfully as he exchanged badinage with the great and near great of the footlight world. And when they went out, she was ever with him, her eyes mirroring the stark, unashamed adoration she had for this incredible Prince Charming of hers.

Although her constant presence might have been responsible for Crissom's feeling imprisoned and a trifle irritated, it was not what he most minded. What was actually the deep rooted seat of his impatience with Alice was the fact that her adoration was becoming embarrassing to him.

He hadn't thought that he would ever have wearied of it. But he at last grew perilously close to that state. And, what was worse, her worshipful manner was a measure by which he finally became aware that she, and she alone, was the only person on earth paying the homage he had once had from all.

Crissom was not entirely a fool. He had had too much genuine admiration and adoration, years before, not to be able to recognize the phony from the real thing. And Alice's demonstration of ever constant true adoration made the insincere flattery and platitudes of his circle show up as conspicuously false.

Subconsciously, therefore, he was beginning to feel that his lack of receipt of the old admiration and adoration from his circle of friends was somehow due to Alice's presence.

He tried, then, to leave her at home occasionally. Aside from the obvious hurt he inflicted on her feelings on these occasions, he paid for his negligence with the realization that only with her could he bask in true idolotrous eminence.

It might have been this knowledge—that he needed her and had to depend solely on her for the maintainance of his ego—that made his irritation toward her grow increasingly more pronounced.

On occasions when her adoration most infuriated him, and he cuffed it aside with a sharp, sneering remark, Alice was given to tears and heart-rending sobs.

IT WAS on these same occasions, immediately after his outburst, that Crissom felt like biting off his tongue. And his realization that he could not afford to drive her from him became a maddening chain that bound him to the reconciliation that inevitably followed.

In one respect, Christopher Crissom did not permit himself to change, how-

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ever. And that was in his lucky cravat. Save when he wore evening clothes, he was never without it.

No matter what the suit he wore, or how well the shirt did or did not suit it, the cravat of shimmering gray-blue silk was always a part of the Crissom wardrobe. Eventually, of course, people began to notice it. Alice, naturally enough, was among the first to become aware of the almost constant presence of the neckpiece.

When pressed by his wife as to why he insisted on wearing the same cravat day in and day out, Crissom at first neatly avoided any explanation that might not be understandable to her by saying that he wore it merely because it was his wish to wear always one bit of apparel he had been dressed in on the day of their first meeting.

Alice thought this sweet, and was tactless enough to mention it to several of their acquaintances, who promptly spread the little legend throughout the rest of their circle. When the smiling comments on this eccentricity reached Crissom's ears, he had to smile, and agree that they were indeed correct, and that that was the reason for his attachment to the tie.

To make matters worse, Crissom found himself as bound to the tie as he was to Alice. On the occasions when he decided to put an end to the silly legend of his eccentricity, he found himself unable to dispose of the neckpiece. The reason for this was simple enough. He could not permit himself to be without it. The superstition he had himself attached to it was now too strong to go against.

And as for the handsome cravat itself, there was something actually remarkable about it. Something beyond the superstition Crissom had attached to it. For one thing, the luxurious splendor of the cravat, the smooth sleek texture of it, the soft, rich radiance of its twin hues, seemed to be anything but deteriorating as time went on. In fact, the quality, the sleek unparalleled excellence of the cravat seemed to be daily growing greater.

Crissom noticed this vaguely as he put it on and took it off at the beginning and end of each day. He had, of course, taken excellent care of the tie, gone through special precautions to see that it did not fray, grow threadbare, wrinkle, or be subjected to the hundred and one deteriorating influences any cravat encounters. However, it was only after several months that he began to be aware that his precautions were entirely unnecessary, that the tie was thriving splendidly without any need of his help.

He wondered about this, of course. And, of course he did not fully believe his eyes. He attributed much of the cravat's peculiar reactions to his own wearing nerves.

Alice, he was thankful, did not notice anything peculiar. She was still far too wrapped up in blissful adoration of her spouse to notice anything else.

On a night in July the Crissoms entertained with one of their most lavish parties. It was an exceedingly gala affair, and Crissom had spent three days with the caterers to make sure that the cuisine, the champagne, the orchestra and the thousand one details of the affair would be perfect.

In keeping with a growing custom, the Christopher Crissoms announced, in their invitations, that the affair was not to be formal. After all, they acknowledged tolerantly, there was a war on. Guests were asked to forego white ties and evening gowns.

ON THE afternoon of that memorable evening, Christopher Crissom was discussing his wardrobe with

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his valet.

"My midnight blue flannel will be suitable," Crissom declared. "A white shirt, of course, and the usual accompanying haberdashery."

"I presume, sir," said the valet "that you desire the usual cravat?"

Crissom paused, measuring the inference in the valet's voice. He had an idea that the man was gently mocking him, was secretly amused at his master's eccentricity.

Crissom glanced sharply at the hall mirror before which he had been standing. The wonderful cravat shone almost luminously about his throat in the mirrored reflection.

It was at that moment that Alice entered the room. She had obviously heard the tag end of the valet-master discussion. She smiled adoringly at Christopher, kindly at the valet.

"You know he'll wear the usual cravat," she told the valet. "What a silly, silly question."

Crissom was now certain that he read faint mockery in the valet's eyes. He blushed, in spite of his desire to maintain dignity. He stared hard at the smiling Alice. She was wearing a frilly afternoon frock, and she looked, Crissom instantly decided, like nothing more than a dumpy, stupid charwoman.

Crissom suddenly realized that he hated his wife, loathed and despised her. And, what was worse, loathed and despised himself for being so horribly dependant on the adoration she gave him.

He was a slave to her, just as he was a slave to the tie.

He turned to the valet. His voice was cold.

"I shall wear the soft blue bow tie," he said.

The valet moved off, and Alice's sharp intake of breath was instant evidence of her hurt and surprise.

Crissom stared at his wife. Tears were coming to her blue eyes, and he realized, with disgust, that she was getting little bags beneath them that helped to accentuate the round, putty-like stupidity of her features. She was actually ugly in that moment.

"Well," he said icily, "what's wrong with you?"

For answer, Alice burst into sobs. She turned and ran swiftly from the hall. He could hear her rushing up the majestic staircase to her room. He didn't follow.

"To hell with her," Crissom thought. "I'm sick of her."

He turned and faced the mirror again. He saw, rather than a reflection of himself, a reflection of nothing but the wonderful cravat. He cursed his fraying nerves, turned from the mirror, and began to tear the tie from about his throat.

When he had it in his hand he didn't trust himself to look at it. Instead, he walked quickly through the hall, found the doorway that led to the kitchen, stamped angrily past startled cooks and caterers busy preparing the evening's repast, and moved directly to the incinerator chute.

He opened the cover of the chute quickly, threw the tie into it, let the cover snap shut with decisive finality.

Then Christopher Crissom left the kitchen and made his way into the drawing room. At the cabinet bar there he found a glass, some ice, and whisky. He proceeded to pour himself four fingers of Scotch. Then, ignoring the ice, he downed the liquor with a quick snap of his head. He repeated this gesture three times more, until he had consumed, all told, better than half a dozen shots of the stuff.

Then he turned to the ice and water, mixed himself a normal drink, lighted a cigarette, sat down, and proceeded to get himself progressively tight. . . .

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AT SIX o'clock, that evening, Crissom rose none too steadily from his chair, finished off his last drink, and decided it was time to dress for the evening's party.

He was not, remarkably enough, completely tight.

Though he had tried admirably to achieve a state of complete inebriation, he had not been successful. And the reason for this had been an increasingly worrisome conscience.

He had worried about Alice. Worried even though he knew he despised the woman. He had worried about his need for her, and the dreadful possibility that he might someday drive her completely from him. He had worried, also, about his wanton, deliberate destruction of the cravat.

It had been a lucky piece. All his good fortune dated from his gaining possession of it. What would happen to him now that it was gone? He felt a terrifying emptiness at the thought that the tie was now completely beyond any repossession. The flames of the incinerator had destroyed it utterly, he knew, scant seconds after he had hurled it down the chute.

Moving across the drawing room to the hall, he felt a strange, awful nakedness around his throat. And when he reached unsteadily to touch his neck with his hand, he realized that his feeling of nakedness was due entirely to the fact that he no longer had the cravat.

Thickly, he cursed himself for a fool. He had been mad to destroy it.

The rage that had possessed him to remove the cravat and destroy it had been a tragedy that he now deeply repented. And the realization that the thoughtless, hate-prompted gesture was beyond recall, beyond any chance of redemption, was almost more than he could stand.

Anguished, he moved up the majestic marble stairway that led to the second floor rooms.

He was passing Alice's room when he heard the muffled, heart-rending sobs that came from it.

He paused there at the door, uncertain, confused, aware only that he needed the dumpy, putty-faced woman beyond that door. Needed the adoration that he could get from her but from no one else in the world.

He knocked impulsively on the door.

The sobbing abated. Alice's voice came to him.

"Who is it?"

"Christopher," he said thickly. "It's Christopher."

He pushed the door open and entered the bedroom. Alice was sitting upright on the bed. Her eyes were red, puffed. She still wore the gown she had been wearing a few hours before. She looked considerably the worse for her tears. But the face she turned to him was anguished, anxious.

"What do you want?" she asked huskily. There was hope in her eyes, and anxiety. Clearly she was wishing for a reconciliation on almost any terms that could leave her a shred of dignity.

And then her eyes went to Crissom's throat. She saw instantly, he knew, that the cravat was no longer at his throat. Her expression changed, and her sobbing began once again.

"Y—you aren't even wearing it now," she wailed accusingly.

Crissom opened his mouth to explain. Then he realized how horrible it would sound to her if he told the truth. He realized, fully, now, how completely the tie and Alice had become twin forces of his need.

Crissom said nothing. Drunkenly, he turned and left the room. The sobs of his wife continued as he closed the door behind him and moved down the hall to his own bedroom.

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In his own room he stared uncomprehendingly for a moment at the clothes laid out for him on his bed. There was the suit, the white shirt, the rest of the haberdashery.

And there was the blue-gray cravat!

FOR an instant the stunning implications of the thing escaped him. He was conscious at first only of the overwhelming relief that came over him at the sight of the cravat.

And then, to his fogged mind, came the realization that he was staring at an absolute impossibility.

It was ridiculous to imagine that that was the same cravat that he had thrown into the flames of the incinerator several hours ago. It was utterly preposterous to assume that the cravat could somehow have been retrieved from those flames unscathed and in the same condition as when it had been tossed into them.

And yet, when Crissom crossed the room and picked the cravat from the bed, he knew instantly by the very texture of it, the smooth sleek feel of it, that it was absolutely the same tie.

He stepped to the bell rope beside his bed and rang for his valet. Crissom met the fellow at the door of his room several minutes later.

"You laid out my clothes?" he demanded, voice still somewhat thick.

"I did, sir," the valet told him, obviously conscious of the fact that his master was slightly under the weather. "Exactly as you directed me to do."

"The bow tie," Crissom demanded. "Did you lay that out?"

"I did, sir," the valet answered.

Crissom stared dully at the man a moment. Then, thickly, he told him he might leave.

When the valet had gone, Crissom returned to the cravat. With hands that were none too steady, he inspected it carefully. It was the same neckpiece. There was no question about it.

Tears streamed from Crissom's eyes. Tears of joy and relief. He fondled the cravat lovingly in his trembling fingers. It was his again, and this time he would never destroy it, or attempt to.

It had brought him adoration when he had been hopelessly without it. That day in the park, when he had been wishing so desperately for it, the tie found him Aliee. And, wearing the tie, he had toasted to his wish for success in winning the woman and the wealth that was hers. He had worn the tie constantly then, and he had gotten his wish. Adoration and wealth had both come to him through this cravat.

Foggily, Crissom tried to remember the words of the little peddler who had given him the neckpiece. The peddler had said something about the cravat's power to bring him what he wished. What was it? Crissom was still too foggy from drink to recall.

It was his very alcoholic fogginess, however, that allowed Crissom to reason as he was reasoning now. Thoroughly sober, he would not have permitted himself to entertain such balderdash in his mind. Completely lucid in this thinking, he would never have carried his acknowledgement of the cravat's power to the extreme he now did.

A sudden wild train of thinking came upon him. He had the cravat once more. The cravat had granted him two of his most burning wishes. Hadn't the little peddler said something about *three* wishes? Crissom closed his eyes and tried to recall. Yes. He had. He had undoubtedly said something about three wishes.

Then there was another wish still within his power!

Crissom's alcoholic haze was still strong enough for him to put into thoughts the submerged fancies that

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he had entertained almost subconsciously until now. He had not found the adoration and acclaim of old in his new life. Only from Alice, that is, had he found it. The lack of completeness in this life, as against his old, younger, and highly successful days, was due to one predominant factor. In those days he had been Christopher Crissom the wealthy, talented, brilliant young actor whose plays were the living legends of Broadway. Now, however, he was merely and old, somewhat entertaining, wealthy ex-actor.

To Crissom's alcoholic haze, the difference was crystal clear. He was not an actor now. Not, at any rate, an important and contemporary successful actor. If he were that, with his combination of wealth and success, he would again achieve the glamor and adoration that came from everyone back in the days when he had been a tyro.

Somehow, in some fashion, he must return to the stage.

CHRISTOPHER CRISSOM donned the cravat with trembling fingers. Then he stepped over to his dressing mirror, gazed at his reflection and at the tie, and whispered:

"I wish to again star on Broadway. I wish to see my name once more, in letters ten feet high, on a Broadway playhouse marquee."

Now he was suddenly sobered. The thrill of the vocal expression of the wish had that so long been a part of him was almost chilling. He felt the tingling certainty that at long last his life would regain its long lost completeness. Now he would have not only wealth and admiration from one. He would have success and the adoration of thousands.

Crissom's eyes gleamed in the speculation of what lay ahead of him now. He was smiling as he rang for his valet. He would launch his return to the stage this very night. No other night could be more propitious. There would be other thespians, many influential producers, writers, newspaper people. It would be sensational.

But first there was the matter of a cold bath, a change of costume, and a reconciliation with Alice. The last was going to be absolutely necessary to his plans. The new play in which Christopher Crissom was to star would have to be financed. And the fortune of Mrs. Christopher Crissom, nee Alice Hoobin, was going to back the production.

When Crissom went again to his wife's room, after bathing, shaving, and being assisted into his clothes by the valet, he was, quite conspicuously, wearing the lustrous cravat.

It was enough to effect an immediate reconciliation. . . .

THE party that evening was a tremendous success all around. It not only provided a gala, free evening of champagne, caviar, and excellent music, but it produced an announcement that was to be the sensation of Broadway on the following day.

Crissom had worked swiftly and shrewdly that evening. He had first buttonholed half a dozen successful and fairly successful playwrights, taken them to his den for a "bit of a talk and a spot of Napoleon brandy," each individually, of course.

By the process of elimination Crissom was able to find three playwrights who had, at the moment, vehicles somewhat suited to his demands for a play. And by the process of letting each eager writer pour the story synopsis into his attentive ear, he found the play he most desired to do. He promptly paid the astonished and gratified young author of the script a thousand dollars (check made out to Alice's bank where they had a joint account) on the spot for an

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option on the play.

Within the next hour Crissom had corraled a slipping, though still somewhat successful, producer. In his den, over a "bit of talk and a spot of Napoleon brandy," Crissom explained his scheme to the producer. The producer had, of course, heard of the play Crissom had bought option on. It had been kicking around Broadway offices for quite a few months, and had only gotten a few half-hearted nibbles.

The producer was polite, at first, but hardly enthusiastic. But when it became clear to him that Crissom intended to foot the bill for the entire production himself, and was willing to put up a spot cash guarantee that would save the producer any possible loss, and insure him positive gain on the show, he changed his attitude remarkably.

"Of course," Crissom explained, "the play as it stands now needs a little alteration. The hero is, shall we say, a trifle too young. It can be changed so that he is a man of middle age, a man of some maturity, but personable, like myself."

The producer agreed. He would agree to anything, in view of the guarantee Crissom was posting with his bank. They then drew up a temporary, though legal, agreement on a scrap of paper from Crissom's desk.

The announcement, when it came at midnight that evening, was scarcely less than stupendous news. Everyone at the party was agog at the news of Crissom's planned comeback, particularly Alice, who had known nothing of it until then.

And when, after the handshaking guests had gone, Crissom explained gently and charmingly to his dumpy spouse that she was to bear the brunt of the production costs on the venture, her reaction was what he had been desperately hoping for—one of complete, adoring, loving trust.

After all, he had made their reconciliation something more tender than such reunions had ever been in the past. The worshipful Alice was riding on a crest of joy. She had never been happier.

And neither, in many years, had Crissom.

IN THE weeks that followed, casting, rewriting of the script, publicity releases, scene and costume design, and a thousand-fold problems beset the busy Crissom. For he was personally, on his own insistance, supervising every angle of his forthcoming return to Broadway.

And in every respect, it had to be said for Crissom that he played all the angles in respect to establishing himself as the one, the only, paramount attraction of the show.

For the feminine lead, against the protests of both his writer and producer, Crissom decided to choose a virtually unknown young actress. His reasoning behind this was sound. She would neither deserve nor demand anything but second billing.

The rest of the cast was personally selected by Crissom on the same basis. The secondary male role, for example, he gave to a bumbling young ham who —he was certain—would make Crissom's efforts look all the better by comparison.

As for the changes in the script which he proposed, and forced into effect, Crissom not only had the characterization of the lead changed to that of a man of more mature years—thus making several of the major plot motivations rather weak—but also saw to it that the part itself, already bulging, was fattened even more.

"I didn't write a monologue!" wailed the stricken young author. "But it looks like that's what this is turning

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into."

However, Crissom softened the blow to the young man's artistic integrity by skillful flattery and a fat advance, cash, of the profits to come.

CHRISTOPHER CRISSOM, in his full glory and with his ever present resplendent cravat about his throat, was also a constant thorn in the side of the show's director. He saw to it that every line, every gesture, every nuance in the acting of the other members of the cast was tailored to his own specifications.

He saw little of Alice during these hectic weeks. She was permitted to view a few of the rehearsals and sit in on some of the conferences, but only as a grand concession on the part of her wildly busy husband.

He still needed her affection, adoration, and unflagging, starry-eyed admiration—as he was still getting not a whit of this response from his associates. However, the point galled Crissom considerably less than it had previously, inasmuch as he now knew that the day when he would return to overwhelming public affection was not far off.

Ironically enough, to the few of his old fellow thespians who approached him for work when they learned that he was coming out with a show, Crissom was coolly indifferent. He told them that he didn't have anything, and the manner in which he let them know this suggested that if he had anything open they would have been the last theatrical people in the world, he'd turn to. Clearly, he let them know that the theater had no place for has-been, down-and-outers.

There was some argument with the writer, producer, and several members of the cast as to the opening of the show. All, save Crissom, insisted that it should be given the usual trail-run out of town before bringing it to Broadway for the opening. But Crissom declared that the idea was a lot of rubbish. They would open on Broadway, he maintained. And it was for such an opening that the arrangements were made.

The night of the dress rehearsal was worse than hectic.

Crissom, the only unperturbed member of the cast, skillfully carried them along as the others blew lines, messed up entrances, and generally encountered the gamut of troubles run by any company in its pre-opening dress rehearsal.

When it was over, he was not at all bothered. It was theatrical legend, he pointed out truthfully enough, that a bad dress rehearsal presaged a successful first night.

The cast of "Turmoil," which was the name of the show, took some comfort in this reminder of Crissom's. They left the darkened theater, however, with their fingers crossed.

Crissom, when he returned home that evening, found Alice waiting up for him. He had forbidden her to attend the dress rehearsal because of reasons of theatrical superstition, hastily invented by Christopher Crissom.

"How was it, Christopher?" she asked him eagerly.

Crissom saw the look in her eyes and knew that, no matter what he told her, she would not have to be reassured that the play would be anything but a complete success.

Wearily he told her that everything seemed all right.

She came close to him, and he put his arms around her automatically. Looking up at him, she put her hand lovingly to the wonderful cravat and touched it gently.

"You're wearing it tomorrow night, Christopher?" she asked.

"Turmoil," was a costume piece, a play about the Revolutionary War.

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However, Crissom had stated that he would wear his lucky cravat beneath his other costume.

"I wouldn't be without it," he said in all sincerety.

Alice s i g h e d, and was blissfully happy, for she believed this to be a tribute to herself. . . .

FOR some reason which he was unable to explain to himself, Christopher Crissom did not sleep soundly that night. He had planned to get his much needed rest through the hours of one in the morning until well after noon, at which time he would breakfast, call the theater to make several last minute arrangements, then ride to the scene of his impending triumph.

He tossed restlessly from one in the morning until six. And at last he was no longer able even to carry out the pretense of sleep. He rose, donned his dressing gown, and tried to read. This effort, futile, lasted until almost ten o'clock. From ten until one in the afternoon, he alternately paced the floor and sat staring into the nothingness of his wall smoking cigarettes.

At two o'clock he emerged from his room, called loudly for breakfast.

Alice's attentions while he ate were infinitely more irksome to him than they had ever been. And when she became aware of his irritation she put it down to his opening night nervousness, and forgave him from the very depths of her warm heart.

When Crissom finally left for the theater at five-thirty that afternoon, his temper was as unstrung as she had ever seen it. But, again, she attributed it to the artistic temperament in its hour of crisis, and forgave him.

"I'll be there, dearest Christopher," she promised as she bade him goodbye. "Right in the front row center."

Crissom said nothing to this, although he wished he had been able to keep her from the opening entirely. It had been enough of a battle as it was, however, to keep her from staying backstage during the performance.

As Crissom stepped out of the limousine before the theater he had the infinite satisfaction of seeing, in lights ten feet high on the marquee over the theater, the name he loved best.

"Christopher Crissom."

Beneath his n a m e, in somewhat smaller lights, was the name of the play. Then, running along the border of the marquee, in lights less garish than the first two, were the names of the rest of the leading members of the cast.

Crissom stood there, staring up at the glittering wattage that spelled out his name. He looked left and right, and once again saw the rest of the Broadway panoply. It was balm to his soul, tonic to his spirits. His irritation and anger faded, and his step was definitely sprightly and confident.

Backstage, he found everything in the familiar jumble of organized confusion that marked any theatrical opening night. Members of the cast dashed madly about between stage technicians, property men, electricians and scenery movers.

He smiled warmly at one and all, beaming confidence, and felt an irrepressible thrill as he heard his name whispered and realized that people were pointing to him.

In his dressing room the producer was waiting, as well as the wardrobe man, the make-up artist and the author of the show. Crissom beamed at them all, and in scarcely five minutes they had been touched by some of his confidence.

When the producer and author had gone, Crissom began to dress with the assistance of the wardrobe man. Crissom had left his valet, whom he detested, at home.

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THERE was a moment of startled silence when, after removing his lustrous cravat, and following it with his shirt, he picked up the cravat and knotted it about his naked throat.

Neither the make-up assistant nor the wardrobe man made any comment at the actor's obvious superstition. That would have been distinctly against the rules of the game. Crissom, smiling, wondered if in this later and overwhelmingly successful career which he was launching tonight, the legend of his tie would go down in theatrical history.

At last, attired in a costume or revolutionary era, Crissom surveyed himself in his dressing mirror, felt an infinite wave of satisfaction flood over him, and smiled compliments to his assistants.

The stage manager's assistant knocked on the door of his dressing room a few minutes later to tell him that there were five minutes until curtain time.

The report came to Crissom a minute after that, that the house was full.

"They loved me once," he smiled, "and they shall love me again."

Crissom took no stock of the fact that, in these times, almost any Broadway opening night was bound to produce a full house. He was still smiling as he left his dressing room and made his way down to the wings.

The scenery was ready for the curtain. It was an early New England farmhouse kitchen. The feminine lead was seated at a table, lower right, reading a copy of the Bible. On the hearth, back and center, a cauldron bubbled over an imitation fire.

As the curtain rose, Crissom drew a deep breath. The girl on the stage read aloud a passage from the Bible. A two line opening. And on that cue, Christopher Crissom, attired in the costume of an early colonial settler, made his entrance.

As he strode out on the stage and into the luminence of the footlights, Crissom boomed his opening line.

The girl picked up the following line, and the play was on. Crissom was again in glory. He strode back and forth across the stage thundering his lines, using every old trick he had learned to steal the lines of his foil, and generally commandeering the scene.

It wasn't until after five minutes, however, that he began to notice the unmistakable snickering coming from the audience. And when it did finally come to his consciousness, he turned quickly to see what it was in the playing of his feminine lead they found so amusing.

It was less than three minutes later, however, as the snickering increased, and frank laughter began to sound forth from the audience, that Crissom began to be uncomfortably aware that the amusement in the audience was not directed at the other principal on the other principal on the stage, but at himself.

He was aware that girl was making covert gestures to him, and turning, he saw the prompters in the wings were also making frantic signals in his directions. They were all pointing to their throats.

IT WAS then that he looked down and saw that his beautiful cravat had somehow, in some unthinkable, impossible fashion, crawled up on his throat until it spilled out over the white, lace—ruffled colonial shirt-front that was a part of his costume.

The incongruity of the picture, the lush cravat atop the dated shirt front, was the source of the amusement, of course. Crissom, at that point blew a line dreadfully. Then, clumsily, almost amateurishly Crissom tried to cover his horrible accident. He moved swiftly

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to the hearth, improvising a line with his back to the audience, bending over the cauldron as he did so, and covertly trying to stuff the cravat back into place beneath the ruffled front of his costume.

His frantic affórts repaired the damage, concealed the cravat once more, but resulted in his knocking the boiling kettle from its stand over the artificial "flames".

This brought fresh guffaws from the audience, and further unnerved Crissom. And, although he did not blow his next several lines, the inexperienced young actress playing opposite him did just that.

The laughter grew stronger, continuing through to the end of the scene and the merciful curtain.

In the interval between scenes all was tumultuous. Crissom, badly shaken, was scarcely able to rally the rest of the cast. To the suggestion that he remove his betraying cravat, in order to eliminate any further chance of its causing havoc, Crissom became enraged.

In the second scene, involving five players and several walk-ons the confusion increased, and with it the delighted, guffawing glee of the audience. Lines were blown left and right. Cues were missed under accidentally hilarious circumstances.

And the cravat popped forth again.

When the curtain went down on the second scene, ending the first act, the house was in an uproar of hilarity.

Between acts, Crissom stormed, shouted, and berated the members of his cast, rattling them still further. And in his rage, he tore the cravat from his throat and threw it angrily into a refuse can.

The cast was scarcely ready when the second act curtain rangs up, even though it had been delayed five minutes beyond the time. The opening of the second act, however found Crissom on the stage alone, engaged in a monologue which was his meatiest part of the show.

He had rallied considerably, even though he had rattled the others in the cast, and made a start which was almost creditable. After all, some of his long lost stage lore still remained.

However, he had an audience to face which was now willing howl its glee at anything even faintly suggestive of humor. And the very overplaying which Crissom was doing, was enough to start the sniggering all over again.

The snickers didn't break into actual laughter, however, until the end of the second act. There were four other players besides Crissom on the stage, by that time, and he was holding center with another tailored long diatribe.

When the laughter broke forth again, he glanced wildly toward the wings, saw the prompters pointing to their throats, glanced down, and realized that the cravat had again crept out of hiding under his costume, and decorated the lace front of his shirt.

Crissom didn't try to cover it this time. His shock was too great.

He knew he had tossed the tie into the rubbish can, after tearing it from his throat. He knew there was no possible manner in which it could have gotten back around his throat once more. But there it was.

This time the other members of the cast tried to save him. Several moved in front of him, feeding him lines which would give him a chance to remove the betraying cravat from view.

Even though Crissom again succeeded, he was a stricken man by the time the curtain rang down on the second act.

CRISSOM listened dully to the roars of mirth from the still hysterical audience, as he waited in his dressing room for the third act warning bell. The tie was still around his neck, and he

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hadn't endeavored to remove it while he changed to the costume for the last act.

He stared glassily into his dressing mirror, a man in a trance, and when the third act curtain finally went up and he strode out onto the stage, the wild hilarity that burst from the audience told him, without his having to look, that the cravat had again edged out from concealment and was hanging down the front of his colonial costume.

He ignored the efforts of his fellow players to cover for him, this time, and wildly endeavored to thrust the tie back into concealment while he stood in full view of the audience.

The house rocked with gale upon gale of laughter.

Crissom, struggling with the tie, found that this time he could not, try as he would, thrust it back beneath his costume. It was like a thing alive, writhing elusively in his grasp and defeating every frantic effort he made to conceal it.

From that moment, until the final curtain, Crissom played the remainder of the show like a mechanical, lifeless robot. He missed not a line, bungled not a cue. But his words, as the words of all players, were lost in the din of laughter that shook the theater.

When the final curtain rang down, to the thunderous applause and wild merriment of the delighted audience, Crisson strode from the stage glassy-eyed and in a trance.

In the wings, mechanically, he tore at the cravat around his throat, and it came suddenly, surprisingly free. His expression was unfathomable as he hurled it to the floor, his motion mechanical as he made his way upstairs to his dressing room.

He could still hear the wild, mocking laughter and applause shaking the theater as he closed the door of his dressing room behind him.

As he began to remove his costume, his eyes paused on the object that lay atop his dressing table.

It was the cravat!

The same cravat, unmistakably, that he had finally succeeded in removing as he'd walked from the stage. Crissom stared in fascination at its lustrous, magnificent beauty.

Three wishes. Adoration, Wealth, Return to the Stage. Each of the three wishes had been granted. What was it the little peddler had said? Chrisopher Crissom stared blankly at the tie, unable to recall the words.

He reached forward, and his hand touched the soft, silken texture of the cravat. It seemed responsively caressing. Mechanically, he lifted it from the dressing table. . . .

CHRISTOPHER CRISSOM was discovered in his dressing room half an hour later, when the door was finally broken down. In half an hour, however, the beautiful, lustrous, richly hued and silken textured cravat had had plenty of time to complete the work he had assigned it when he had tied it to a closet rung, noosed the other end, and hanged himself with it. . . .

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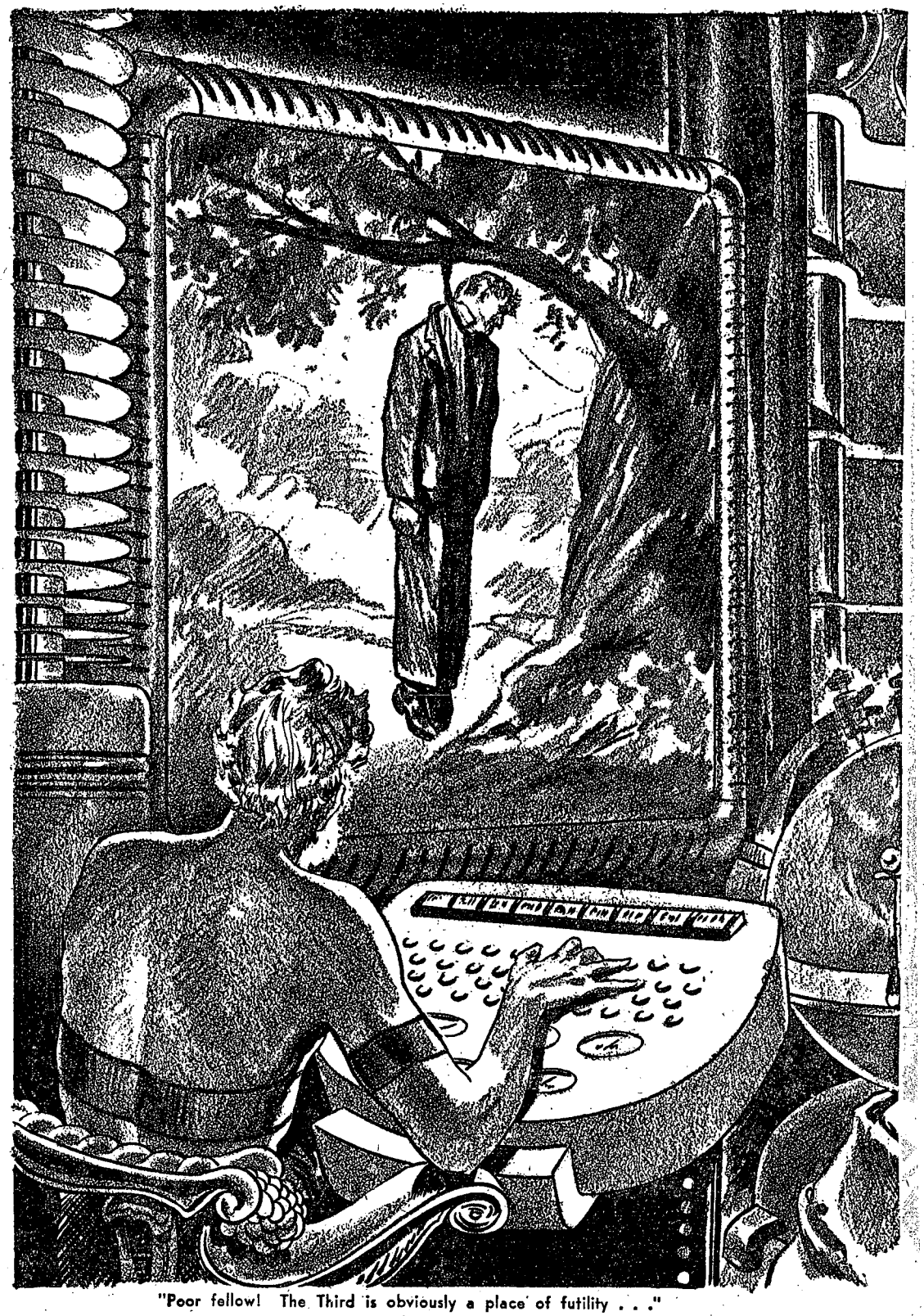

"Poor fellow! The Third is obviously a place of futility . . ."



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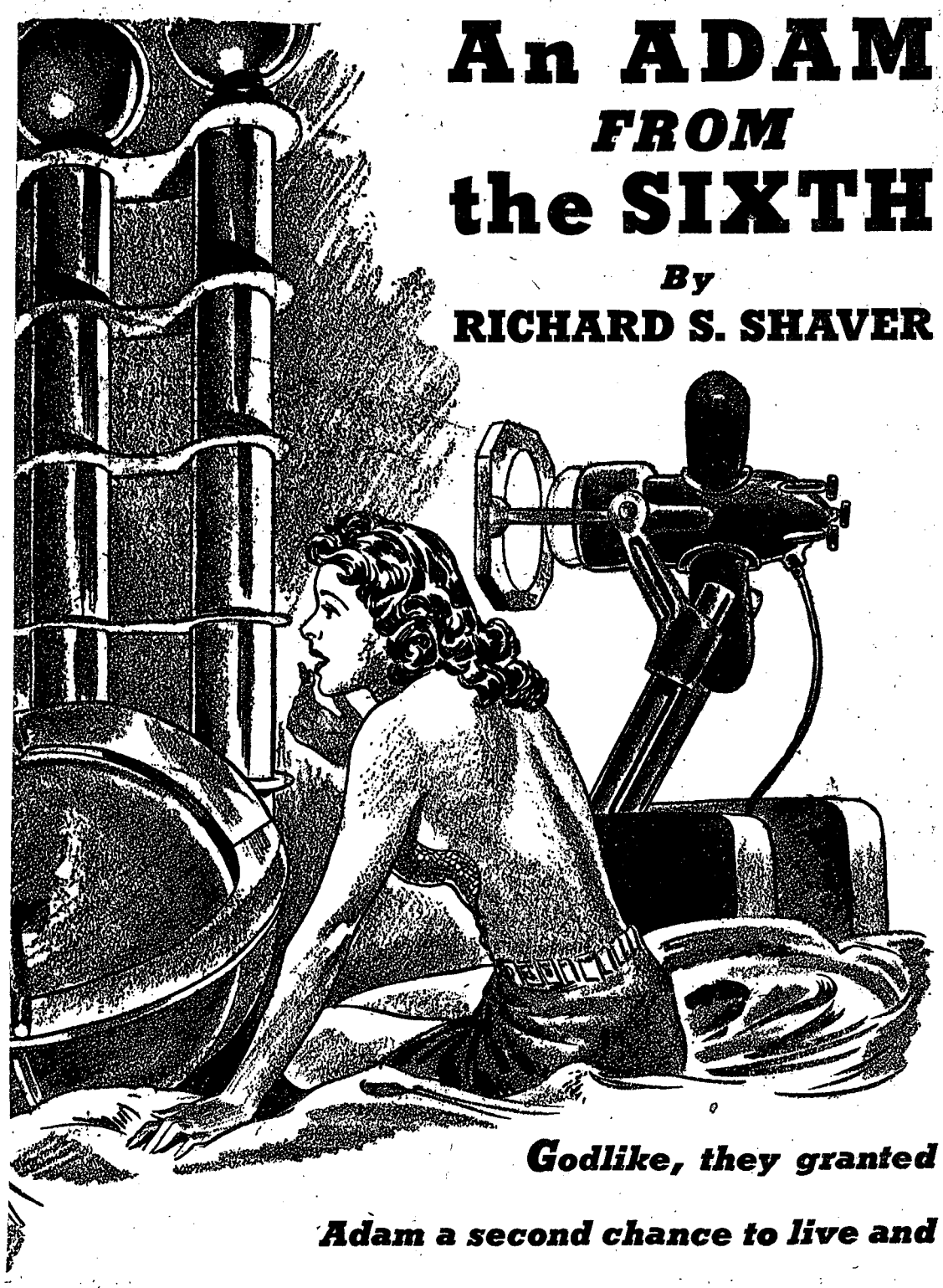
# An ADAM *FROM* the SIXTH

*By*

**RICHARD S. SHAVER**



***Godlike, they granted Adam a second chance to live and then watched to see what his fate would be***



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A FIGURE clad in what would to earth eyes be a bizarre costume, stood before a vast bank of strange apparatus. In the center of this bank of glowing tubes, coruscating wires and whirring discs, was an opening about the size of a door. The figure, who was a scientist of the sixth dimension, was looking intently into the door-like opening.

Beside him a slighter figure, a girl, also peered excitedly into the mists that rose slowly from the door.

"Oh, Father, at last we can really see the third. I wonder what it is like?"

The old man's voice was puzzled as he stared into the other realm. "The opening here seems to center in the heart of a large forest. The forest is deserted—no people, a few very small animals, nothing much at all to inform one of the conditions of life there."

As they watched, a man stumbled into the scene. He was young, good looking, but seemed very tired. He climbed one of the many trees, then tied a rope he carried about the limb on which he sat. The other end he began to fasten clumsily about his neck.

"Oh Father," the girl cried frantically, "do something—he will kill himself!" Her sympathies were stirred to the depths by the pitiful face of the young man, who apparently had nothing more to live for, no desire for anything but death.

The old scientist reached both hands into the opening. Once inside, his hands and arms seemed to swell, to take on the appearance of six hands, six giant hands. The young man's dulled eyes widened as those hands reached fumbling for him, then he shrieked. But remorselessly the great fingers fastened about him, lifted him, and a moment later the old scientist was holding a transparent ghost of a man in his arms. He lowered the transparent man to the floor of his laboratory.

The girl was looking pityingly at the desolate face of the strange young man. "If we sweep his mind with the memory remover that demagnetizes the memory films, he will not remember what made him wish to kill himself, and when he again learns about life, he may be happy."

"Not yet, my daughter. I wish to learn something about this third place in space," replied the scientist, studying the young man with unfeigned curiosity.

ACCORDINGLY a long period of questioning and answering took place, via the thought projector. What he learned was very interesting to the scientist, but as his questions all concerned aspects of what we in the third know as our daily life, the answers would to us be commonplace.

At the end of this period of polite interrogation, the old scientist fastened a silver cord about the man's head, where upon a swift hum in his ears wiped out every bit of memory from his mind. Except for the capabilities that growth gives a man, he was now as a new born babe, knowing nothing worldly. The demagnetizer was not really harmful; it induced a complete amnesia, thus giving a despondent a new start in life. It was standard treatment in the sixth for suicidal tendencies.

Then the old man turned to his daughter. "I have a strong suspicion that in the third the detrimental electric impulses are so strong that there is really no hope for development into genuine intellectual life, no hope for the happiness of the people there. Now, I have a way of proving this without venturing into that world myself. You saw how my arms appeared in that world; I would be a monster there to them, and they might succeed in killing me. But this man, who appears as a

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mere shadow beside our repeated thicknesses, cannot stay here with us happily. I suggest we place him back in his world, after first giving his mind a post-hypnotic command to return to this spot in three months. Thus by observing his condition after three months, we can ascertain the effect of that world upon the clean soul such as he is now become; we can determine what chance he has in that swirl of detrimentally driven organisms we call the third."

The scientist had a mind infinitely more absorbent of information than our own. In the short time he had examined the young man's mind, he had obtained a fairly clear and complete picture of conditions on our earth.

As he again lowered the man into the opening of his spatial gateway, he murmured: "Man, thou puny being, busy forever at thy comings and goings, thy futile devisings, thy snares and gins set for thy brothers, thou destroyer of thy own best love, thou poor fouler of thy own nest, thou despoiler of the innocent, thou simpering hypocrite, I make thee this gift: a clean soul, which I have endowed with all the virtues."

He explained to the girl, "If his world is in truth fit for the growth of true life, he will come back to me in three months of our time, or six months of his time, in better condition than when he left my hands. If the detrimental charge on that earth's surface is too great for anything but the growth of evil forms of life, he will come back, sadly, in much the same shape we found him in originally."

THE MAN who returned from the sixth entered a forest glade. The woods were very lovely. The leaves glistened and turned in the sun like the fins of brilliant fishes; the grass was soft; somewhere a stream splashed itself quietly; all was good.

The young daughter of the scientist of the sixth would have enjoyed his impressions immensely, for they were funny in truth. He was sure it was a new world.

As he stood there, a young woman entered the glade. She was blonde and pretty, with long greenish eyes, but her clothing was rather shabby. She stopped in sudden surprise and apprehension, seeing Adam, for the old scientist had absently-mindedly forgotten to return his clothes after his examination.

"Well, shades of Apollo! Who are you, and why the non-existent apparel?"

"I never had any clothes," answered Adam slowly, falteringly, as one unused to speech. "And who are you?"

He paused but she did not answer. There was an innocent look on his face as he stared at her. "You seem to delight my eyes," he told her with guileless sincerity. "I shall call you woman; you are good to look at."

"All right, call me woman," answered the girl, laughing in spite of herself. "But tell me, you must know how you came to be wandering in the woods like that?"

"Truthfully, I don't know," confessed Adam. "I can remember nothing. A few moments ago I awoke under a tree back there. This world is an entirely new place to me. I never saw it before, I swear."

The young woman murmured to herself: "Amnesia, I'll bet." Aloud she said, "Well, it should prove quite interesting to you, then. Personally, I'm rather tired of the world. I just came into the woods to be alone and out of it for a little."

"I don't know how anyone would tire of it." He waved a hand at the shimmering forest around them. "The light, the leaves, the forms of the trees

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. . . you—your face—all beauty."

"Well, for one who just came into the world, you're learning very rapidly. Your voice is strange; I never heard so strange a voice."

"My voice is strange in my own ears; I seem to be taking these words I use from you. Will you teach me about this life of yours?"

She looked at him a long moment, into the depths of his wise child eyes, and slowly an awe came over her, a feeling that she sometimes had in church, but much more vast. Her breath caught in her throat. The weariness that had been in her bled out. Her heart came to life and reached out toward this one who was more lost than she herself. "I'll think about it." Her voice was mocking in her ears, but she knew that she would always feel responsible for the fate of this tall white infant.

JUST then their conversation was broken off by the entrance of two vagrants. They were equipped for simple living. They built a fire and glanced curiously at the girl standing there with the nude Adam beside her, but they went ahead with the preparation of food without speaking to them. Evidently they had thoroughly learned the lesson of minding their own business. They hung a can over the fire and started the usual mulligan.

The nude man and the woman hung about just out of the way, sniffing hungrily. The nearest hobo, who was heavy-boned and dark as a black bear, suddenly got enough of their peering and sniffing. "What'sa matta'? Din't-cha' never see no one eat before?"

Adam answered without a pause—"Why, no, I don't believe I have. The sight of your preparations gives me strange feelings."

The surly one who had spoken turned to the other. "Listen to him, willya? He's cuckoo as a bed-bug."

The other hobo, who was bigger and rangier than the first and who looked like a man of some education, as well as one of ability, turned to Adam. "Why the birthday outfit? Somebody take 'em off ya?"

The girl came to his rescue. "He's not out of his head. He's just an amnesia victim, and he thinks he just came into the world. He can't remember anything at all, apparently."

He contemplated her various characteristics interestedly. "How'd you come to be on the prod?"

"I wasn't until yesterday. I got fed up with it all and wandered into the woods to run away from myself, I guess. I got lost; couldn't find my way out again, and didn't try very hard. There's not much to go back to. A two-by-four room and a punk job that I hate. Just now I met Adam, here."

The man began to peel off a pair of overalls and an old coat, revealing underneath a suit of respectable clothes. "If I have to, I have to, but I hate to get my good suit dirty," he said, handing the outer clothing good-naturedly to Adam. "Here, we may as well be practical."

Where had she gotten the idea that most people were mean? Here was a tramp putting his own clothes on this unfortunate stranger. Lord, but Adam was white and thin. Was he really an amnesia victim? She felt weak and far away, leaning against a tree; these men were only half real, she was sure.

"Well, if you expect to eat," the other bo broke in, "rustle some more wood for this fire." Aside he said, "Say, Bill, are you gonna feed these saps?"

Bill nodded.

ADAM rushed about and soon had a stack of dead wood beside the fire.

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The blaze mounted and the stew was soon ready to eat.

The bear-like one peered into the steaming can. "Well, I'll get the plates, Bill."

She liked Bill, she decided. What he thought about her, or about anything, could never be told by his face. Its slightly bitter expression never changed.

The bear pulled a great knife from under his arm, went to a nearby birch and cut several squares of bark. He slit each one, and handing a square to the girl, he showed her how to hold it so it formed a dish. Bill lifted the can and filled each plate with the thick liquid. There was also bread wrapped in a newspaper.

She had never tasted anything quite like the stew. The hot strength of it trickled into her emptiness magically.

"This tastes too good to be true!"

"I gather you haven't eaten since yesterday," said Bill.

Through a full mouth she answered: "And very little then."

Adam was eating with his fingers, in blank rapture. "And *this* is food! Your world grows more interesting with every fresh experience."

The woman smiled upon Adam. "I feel very much as though I had never eaten before myself. I can understand."

Bill sat looking at the girl's face glowing like a pale flame, her eyes two green floating emeralds throwing little sparks. Why should a girl as lovely and intelligent as she get fed up with life? He wanted to put his hand on her hair where it threw back the blaze of the fire. His eyes turned to Hank, the bear-like one. His little round eyes were on the girl; they glinted, redly greedy in the flames. He'd have to watch Hank. She wasn't that kind of a girl. Besides, he liked her too much himself.

Then in a loud commanding voice Bill said, "Hank, clean up. Quit staring at the company and clean up things."

Hank was angered at Bill's barking voice. He snarled, "What the hell! What's the punk for?"

Bill's long brown face lit up, his mouth twisted peculiarly. He'd been wanting to get a rise out of Hank for a long time. He wanted to shake him. Weeks before, the man had slavishly attached himself to him. The presence of the woman was the spark needed. He rose slowly.

"Hank, we're gonna have a showdown. You've been easin' out of things too long. It's now or else—"

The woman jumped up quickly. "I'll clean the things. It should be my job anyway."

Determination to enforce the supremacy of his will spread over Bill's face. "Sit down, girl," he said. "Hank and I are gonna have a showdown."

HANK understood. The woman had changed things. He got to his feet, balled his fists and leaned forward on his toes, his legs wide spread. He understood that the presence of the girl was responsible, that Bill was determined to show him he must leave her alone. It was in his mind that if he could do for Bill, the girl would be at his mercy.

Bill stepped lightly in a crouch toward Hank and threw a light left at his head. As Hank's hands came up, he drove his right deep into the man's soft stomach, a blow with all his weight behind it. Hank grunted and his face twisted into lines of agony. He sank slowly to one knee, his arms wrapped around his body. There was no sound but Hank's futile pain-wracked struggle for his breath.

Bill stood ready to repeat. He liked

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the feel of a fight, the stimulated blood pouring through him, the crawling that ran over him like wire brushes, the fearful *if*, and the face that must be battered. He liked these things too much.

As Hank's breathing grew easier, Bill turned half away, as if to tell him that was all, if he had learned to behave.

Suddenly the girl screamed. He whirled toward Hank to see him leaping upright with his knife in his hand, a red, insane rage in his eyes. Bill twisted aside, his feet as swift as a dancer's; and the burly one passed him, almost falling in the fire as he turned. Among the wood that Adam had gathered lay a three-foot billet of oak. Bill bent and grabbed it. When he felt the heft of the thing in his hands, he knew it would win over any knife. As Hank came in, the knife arcing toward his breast, he leaned outside the gleaming circle and as the blade passed, closed in. The oak cracked loudly on the heavy, round skull. Hank dropped, a dull sodden sound on the wet clay, and lay face downward, twitching a little.

The loud sounds of breathing, the shuffle and stomp of their feet were now ended, and a dead quiet descended that was frightening. Hank's figure lay stretched on the ground by the fire, too still.

Watching Bill, the girl thought how fierce and wise and masklike was his face. She spoke to break the heavy strangeness and the fear that had come on her. "Well, that didn't take long . . ." Her voice sounded forced, a little quaver in it.

Bill looked at her, at her too white face and those emeralds that floated in it, saying strange poems to him. His voice was husky in his ears; it didn't obey him. "I didn't trust him. You won't have to worry tonight. Tomorrow I'll take you to town."

Adam had watched, his hands gripping his knees, his face unreadable. Now he rose and went to the prone figure, prodding him curiously. He felt of the shaggy head and then his own. Gradually he stiffened in rigid horror as he sensed death. He stared at his red-covered hand. His voice was awed—and as strange as the sob of the wind.

"And this . . . is death!"

ADAM, Bill, and the girl were standing on the brink of a cliff, staring down into the distance, where the city began its strange regularity over the natural face of earth. Adam was speaking.

"What is that strange pattern of straight lines and squares below us?"

"The city," Bill answered good humoredly. He was growing more and more interested in this fellow who knew nothing about the world, yet who was clearly intelligent.

"City," queried Adam. "And the crawling black dots and darting things?"

"They're beings like you and me, but in wheeled things that carry them about."

Adam was evidently still thinking of Hank. "They die?" he asked.

Bill answered slowly, thinking deeply of death: "Like flies or ants or any other insects, they die."

The woman gazed pensively back into the forest. "But they love, too," she said.

Bill looked at her, probing her eyes. "And usually they love like flies or any other insects."

She made an exclamation of displeasure. "Ohhh! Love is beautiful."

"Possibly it could be, but I have found little beauty in the sating of my lust."

Adam looked at them curiously. "Love? Lust? What are these?"

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Bill looked at the girl's face as he answered Adam. "Love is a business of convincing yourself that some other being is more lovely, more exquisite, more confoundedly distracting, more utterly desirable, more gracefully motioned, more liquidly languishing, than any person could possibly be. Convincing yourself in spite of your natural desire for freedom, that your whole life should be spent in slavish devotion to the utterly non-existent qualities your imagination has conjured into being about the body of some cheap little skirt. Love is a disease. Love is desire."

There was a long pause. Bill and the girl gazed into each other's eyes as though seeking the depths where the real person lived.

But Adam was insatiable. "And lust?"

Bill went on, his voice full of a strange anger. "Lust is blood beating in your eyes so that women's bodies turn to sweetly twining snakes before you. Lust is a drumbeat of mother nature's black, mysterious devising, that makes every atom of your body leap to the rhythm of procreation. Lust is a word on a fence. Lust is life's desire and demand for life diverted and perverted into the channels of unclean thought. Lust is evil desire. Hank was Lust."

The girl sighed. "Well, that seems to cover the ground."

Adam's voice was thoughtful. "I do not know these things."

Bill turned his eyes from the girl's. "You are going to the city; you will learn those things, Adam."

THE girl was setting crockery on the table. It was a flimsy table. There was a gas range in the corner, and a small sink. A couple of folding beds took up most of the room. Some pots were steaming on the stove. The girl was gazing out of the window, humming, as Adam, in working clothes, came in.

He took off his jumper, went to the sink, and washed his face and hands.

"How did you find working?" asked the girl cheerily.

"I didn't care much for it. I do the same thing over and over all the time. I find it very pleasant to get back and see your face again and hear your voice." Adam went to the window and gazed out absently. "Your hair makes me think of the sun and the light on the leaves when the birds were singing that first morning."

There was a long silence in the room. Finally the girl answered him. "Yes, I like to hear you say that, Adam."

"I think I know what love is now." Adam's voice was low and he still gazed out the window.

Then Bill came in, also in working clothes, wearing a chauffeur's cap and a cab driver's outfit. Bill said cheerfully, looking at the girl but talking to Adam: "Well, Adam, how goes the work?" He too went about the business of washing up.

Adam's voice was despondent. "Oh, it goes all right. It goes all the time. I can hardly keep up with it."

"It's all in a lifetime, Adam."

Adam looked out the window again. "I have not had a very long life. The sky is blue. The girl's eyes are blue."

"Ah, ah," cried Bill; "you've been looking at girls. They are a good way to get in trouble, Adam; better look the other way."

"Yes, I have been looking at girls. They are lovely beings. Their heels go click-click. They are round and soft. They smile and laugh. It is very pleasant to look at girls."

"Well, just so you only look, I guess it won't hurt anything." Bill grinned

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at Adam.

Adam answered slowly. "Today I touched a girl."

Bill's voice was mock awe. "Noooo!"

"Yes," went on Adam. "It was a strange thing to touch a girl."

Bill clucked his tongue. "Tch, tch."

The girl spoke sharply to Bill. "Don't mock him, Bill. Pull up your chairs; everything's ready."

"I enjoy eating." Adam was forcefully cheerful again. "I am glad we are going to eat now. It is pleasant to look at your faces and talk. And the food tastes almost as good as it did the first day. My body is not so tired after eating."

They ate. Adam handled utensils clumsily, ate slowly, savoring each bite with an exaggerated facial expression.

AFTER supper Bill picked up the paper and glanced at the headlines. Adam rose. "I think I will go for a walk. Do either of you want to go along?"

Bill kept on reading the paper and did not answer. The girl answered him carelessly. "I can't, I have the work to do."

Adam walked to the window and looked out. "I want to look at the city, at night. Lights are flickering on. All the city people are sitting around tables enjoying each other's faces and talking and eating. People like food. In the big streets great colored lights are making pictures and words—telling people to come in and enjoy pleasant sights and to dance and eat and drink pleasant drinks. The city is beautiful."

Adam went out into the night. As Adam left, the woman, in mockery that Adam did not hear, said: "The city—is beautiful."

"Poor devil," concurred Bill. "This lousy burg is a fairy tale to him. I wonder . . . who he is." The last Bill said with a slight note of awe.

"He is so vulnerable. So open and so good. He could be terribly hurt so easily. We must look out for him."

The woman began to gather the dishes. Her arm touched Bill's. He took her wrist in his big palm. "Woman, how long do you think I can wait? I am a man. When I come in and see you, the blood beats hot in my throat, my hands tremble, everything gets rosy on the edges. This can't go on forever."

The woman drew back, looking at Bill as though passionately aroused, but afraid for some reason. "I can't. I'm not sure. I don't . . . know."

Bill released her and hunched over moodily, wringing his hands once to drive the blood out. "It's him, God damn it. You love the holy sap."

As she left the room Bill muttered, "But I—I am not a fool. That poor devil is not going to stand between me and what I want."

Bill rose and went to her, in the next room. Running his hands over her shoulders and arms, he turned her about and crushed her in an embrace, kissing her. She struggled, then relaxed. Bill picked her up, carried her through the door to the inner room.

After a long time Adam returned, hung up his cap, and went to the window, looking out. "I have seen the city, at night," he said aloud, though no one was in the room. "The people come and go in swift cars. On the streets they walk. Their faces are tired, they do not smile on one another. Their voices are hard and toothed, like a work-file. I saw a sign for dance and drink. I thought I would enjoy myself and other people. I went in. They took much of my work-money. On the faces was evil desire. On the faces of the beautiful women was desire for my work-money and a

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lust that was not even a true lust, but a false thing put on their faces. My veins hummed strangely. I desired them and yet I was repelled. I danced. I would like to dance but they laughed at me because I knew not how. I embraced them and swayed to the music, but my feet did not know what to do. Their bodies felt strange and soft against mine. They smelled oddly sweet, like the flowers that first day. And yet not the same, but falsely so. The flowers seemed long dead. They smiled upon me, but their smiles did not ring a bell in my heart, but seemed like something they had picked up, and put on their faces to hide them."

Adam looked long from the window in sorrowful contemplation of the falsely glittering lights of the city.

THE woman came to the door at the left. Straightening her hair with her hand, she went to a small mirror and switched on the table lamp. Combing her hair, she turned and saw Adam. She started guiltily as she saw the knowledge of what had happened steal over Adam's face. Adam sat down heavily as though someone had struck him.

"Oh." The woman's voice was a rich sound of sympathy, as though she had unwittingly hurt a child. She crossed to Adam and patted him on his shoulder, gazing down into his stricken face.

"You do love me, don't you?" she asked him softly.

"You were the first woman I ever saw, on the first day. When you smile it is not something you put on to hide your face, but it is a bell ringing in my breast. My veins sing when I see you, like the birds sang on the first day. Your lips are as a flower I saw in the wood. Your hair is the sun on the trees. Your hands are white and warm and soft like two white birds together on a limb. You are more desirable than any being could possibly be. Your body is before my eyes when I am at work and when I sleep. Now you are—" Adam looked at his hand. His voice was awed, reminiscent of his awe of death. "I have just felt a death. I love you."

Adam put his arms around her and laid his head against her body. She stroked his hair and wept silently. Adam's face was contorted in unbearable pain. The woman kept murmuring, "Oh, oh," as one comforting a child.

SOME months had elapsed since they had been in the city. Bill sat near the center of the room, his shoulders hunched, staring in misery at a hole in the carpet. Now and then he heaved a great breath out of his lungs, as though it hurt him to breathe. He cursed silently, then aloud.

"God Almighty damn." He let out a great gust; he seemed to be cursing the weight of time.

Adam came in, dressed in working clothes. Hanging his hat, he washed his hands carefully. His face was blank, he seemed to be more haggard and thinner than formerly.

"Where is she?" asked Adam.

Bill looked at Adam for a long moment, then answered, "She is sick."

"Sick?" Adam gazed at Bill dully. "Where is she?"

"They have taken her to the hospital." Bill's voice was impatient.

"Hospital?" Adam's voice was still a question.

Bill looked at him, a little pity for him on his face. "Yes. She was taken sick this morning. It's an epidemic. A lot of people are sick and dying from it. This lousy burg has no decent sanitary system. The Health Department should be called the Disease Distributors. The landlady called me at the

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cab company, and I came home and sent her to the hospital. It's a question."

"What's a question?"

"Whether she'll die," answered Bill sadly.

"Die!" Adam would not understand; his mind refused the meaning.

"Like a fly," Bill's voice went on inexorably, "or any insect."

Adam sat down, white-faced. Bill took a bottle from his pocket and handed it to Adam. Adam drank; the fiery stuff set him coughing; his eyes started. Bill took the bottle and drank a great gurgling draught. He set the brown oval on the table and watched the light play on the faceted surface. He cursed softly, steadily. His face was dark red, Adam's stark white. Time was a great weight in the room.

A FEW days had passed. In the room was woman and death in a black box. There were flowers that Bill had bought and some from the landlady.

Bill came in from her room, his shoulders in an almost imperceptible crouch, as though to duck a blow. He stood a long time gazing at the dead face, white and beautiful, with the hair flaming softly around it.

"Woman—" he said, as brutally as to a despised street-walker.

"Woman—" again, but as softly as to a child.

"Woman—" and his voice was full of desire, as if he would wake her with his want of her.

"Woman . . ." He gave a gesture of finality, as if to say, "This dead thing was a woman . . ." He bent and kissed her and went out.

The body lay white and still. A fly buzzed. The flowers spread their heavy odor over the room like a fog. Adam came in, his feet clumping stiffly. He was bowed, his face was set in cramped, hard lines of misery. He went up to the coffin through the thick silence. His voice hung in the air as he talked to her, hung and broke.

"Your face is whiter now than any face I ever saw. Your eyes are not open, like the sky, but closed, like night. If you would laugh I would feel good again. The sun would brighten, my ears would drink your laugh slowly, like I drink cold water. There is a heavy smell now, like flowers that have died. The house is very dark. I hear sounds like the wind, or like wings. Woman, say something to me. I feel very heavy inside. I would touch your lips if you said yes . . . You do not speak. You do not say no. . . . I will touch your lips"

Adam reached out a slow hand and touched her mouth with his fingers. He lay his hand upon her face, then both hands, lightly yet clumsily.

"You are cold. Does it hurt to be cold? I am hurting and I am not cold."

He bent over, his face very close to hers. "You do not breathe. I wish I did not breathe! I would not hurt.

"You do not see. Your eyes are closed." He closed his eyes, then opened them. "I still see you. It hurts to see. It was pleasant to see in the wood, on the first day. Maybe you are not woman. You do not speak or laugh. You are in a box. Woman should not be in a box.

"I will go to the wood. I do not like the city any more. My ears hurt from work noise, my eating is not good to me. My eyes hurt from light, my hands hurt from work. I will look for woman where I first saw her."

His feet clumped out, his eyes were staring, as they were when he first saw the day and a human being.

ADAM was in the wood that evening. A whippoorwill wailed. An owl

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drifted like a gray ghost before his eyes. He was sobbing softly. Suddenly his voice rose in a great cry of agony and as quickly died down. He was an automaton, feeling but one thing —pain. His voice babbled like a child between his sobs.

"I am breathing. I wish I did not breathe. She does not breathe now." He felt his neck. "If I could stop breathing, I would get cold, like her. My breath is hot."

In his hands he held a rope he had picked up, the same rope he had left lying there a few months ago.

"At work I learned to tie a knot." Adam tied a knot in the rope expertly, jerking it tight over his knee. He put the loop over his head. He climbed a tree, gasping. Then his body became a dark pendulum among the gathering shadows.

## ☆ SEA GOLD ☆

THERE is an island off the coast of Yucatan which gathers its wealth from the surrounding sea. Everyday is a fishing day for the menfolk of Holbox and the object of the deep water quest is the dreaded shark. Not only does the search for the deep sea monster provide a livelihood for these people, but it enables them to live very well. The water engulfing the island swarms with the sea creatures, and these people feel themselves rich, indeed, to have such a good source of income right at their very door. What brave men to go out onto the ocean in a twenty-five foot open boat, and with the aid of strong nets capture brutes which themselves are between fifteen and twenty feet long. To kill the shark, broad-bladed spears are driven through the spine at the base of the skull. Often the small fishing craft is dragged far out onto the sea before the vicious captive is game to give up the fight for its life. As long as can be remembered not one of the island fishermen has ever been lost on the ocean. These are skilled and fearless men!

Many will wonder why the shark is important enough to be taken from its watery home. Almost every bit of the fish can be utilized. Now, the islanders from Holbox merely catch the sea creatures, and sell their parts to the various markets all over the world where each part is put to its respective use. The shark has an unusually large liver, and this is a source of a very fine and valuable oil. Curio seekers are delighted with the teeth and jaws of the fish, and these are found on the counters of seaside resorts. The Chinese have a very special brew called Sharks Fin Soup, and it is easy to understand that it is made from the dried fins. The meat, bones, and intestines provide good material for fine fertilizer. Best of all, the hide of the shark is tough and durable enough to be tanned into a fine grade leather. It is little wonder that the people of Holbox are able to live comfortably and securely from their catch from the deep blue sea. This tiny place, hardly more than a spot on the map, takes its specialty from the vastness of the ocean and sends it far and wide to many lands. Their catch from the sea is pure gold!—*S. Miller.*

## ☆ SOAP BUBBLE DREAM ☆

ETIENNE and Joseph Montgolfier were wealthy paper manufacturers of Annonay, France. After 1782, however, they did very little paper manufacturing. They had read of Tiberius Cavallo and his large soap bubbles, which when filled with an "inflammable air" arose rapidly until they were lost to view. Tiberius Cavallo, an Italian philosopher, had delighted himself with these hydrogenated bubbles, but the Montgolfiers would do him one better. They would fill a huge paper container with this "inflammable air" and construct the first specially designed balloon.

With so much paper at their disposal, they set out with the task of making a dream come true. It never worked. Their paper was too porous to keep the small and fast moving hydrogen molecule inside the paper container. Did the Montgolfier brothers give up? Not these two. They had an entire factory full of paper and were determined to inflate a paper sphere even if they had to invent their own gas. By burning slightly moistened straw and wool, they did develop a slower diffusing gas. This gas was soon put to test with disappointing results. True, the gas was lighter than air and yet more slowly diffusing than hydrogen, but the paper pores would not listen to reason—it failed to retain this new gas.

The Montgolfiers were convinced that their paper was at fault, and set out to modify it so that it could retain the hot air they had developed. They did just that. The solution to their problem was a simple one after they had developed a combination fabric composed of packcloth and paper.

On June 5, 1783, an empty seated spheroid ascended 6,000 feet—the first of the hot air balloons. —*Pete Bogg.*

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Ten Eyck's face twisted in terror as he saw the upraised pipe and he leaped to forestall the blow . . .

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# A CRYSTAL AND A SPELL

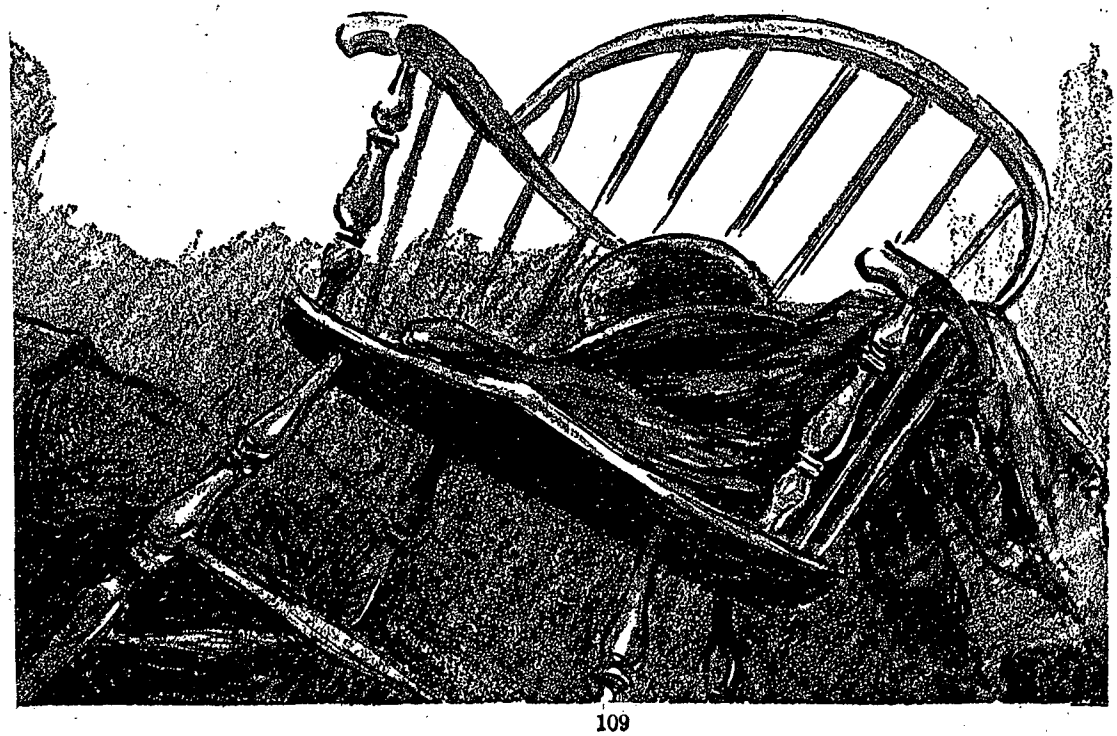
## By Chester S. Geier

**The crystal had the power to cause a spell—but in looking into the crystal there was danger, for it sapped the strength . .**

AFTERNOON sunlight, filtering like golden liquid through the leaves and branches of bordering trees, lay in bright puddles along the asphalt path. Amos Burrick hurried on rheumatic legs down the path, toward the small plaza at its end. He had unbuttoned his worn blue jacket, and his shapeless greenish black hat was pushed to the back of his untidy gray head.

In the somnolent quiet of the park came the many-toned twittering of birds, with an occasional nearby flutter of wings. Somewhere in the distance, a power-driven lawn mower buzzed, and the voices of playing children rang with muted stridence. A cool breeze, tangy with the mingled scents of grass and flowers, stirred fretfully on the warm air. The surrounding foliage rustled with a note of protest in the breeze, as if resentful of being disturbed.

Burrick squinted his fading brown eyes near-sightedly as he approached





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the plaza. In the center of it, a granite Lincoln slumped broodingly in a granite chair. The statue was mounted upon a concrete pedestal, and around the sides of this wooden benches had been placed. Nobody was seated on the two benches visible to Burrick. He wondered anxiously if Jon Ten Eyck had come to the park this day.

Burrick felt a pang of apprehension that had in it all the poignancy of a child about to be deprived of its favorite toy. For a moment that old feeling of unutterable loneliness returned overwhelmingly. He had spent many pleasant hours in Jon Ten Eyck's company, and he had looked forward to this afternoon with especially keen anticipation.

Burrick hurried forward to get a view of the other two sides of the pedestal. He knew, if Jon Ten Eyck had come to the park at all, that he was certain to be here, for like Burrick, he had found this portion of the park most to his liking. Though Ten Eyck was a newcomer to the park, Burrick had already learned this much.

It was on one of the benches around the pedestal a few days before that Burrick had met Ten Eyck. Burrick himself was a frequent visitor to the park, for the simple reason that he had nowhere else to go. He was just in the way at home, as his son's wife loudly and all too often informed him. A widower, he had come to live with his son several years previously, board payments from a skimpy savings account making him welcome enough. But now the money was gone, and he lived on charity and borrowed time.

The matter of charity did not bother him, for he felt that his son owed him that much. The matter of borrowed time was a worry, but he had learned not to think about it too often. What really hurt was the fact that he had nobody to talk to. His son was too busy for companionship, his son's wife too annoyed by his profitless presence to be amiable at any time, and the children had reached that age where they possessed little if any patience with the old. An elderly man is usually garrulous and loves company, and Amos Burrick was more typical than most.

BURRICK slowed his eager pace as he neared the statue. Rounding one corner of the pedestal, he saw an old man seated on a bench, reading a newspaper through gold-rimmed spectacles perched low on his round red nose.

Burrick sauntered up casually. "Hello, Mr. Ten Eyck," he said.

Ten Eyck peered over the top of his spectacles and smiled. "Ah, it is *Mynheer* Burrick." He gestured in invitation at his bench.

Still casually, Burrick seated himself beside the other. He removed his hat, and as if it were new and quite expensive, placed it carefully on the bench at his side. He crossed his legs in their shiny threadbare trousers and leaned back comfortably. He said:

"A nice day, Mr. Ten Eyck, a nice day."

Ten Eyck took off his spectacles and gazed about him as though for the first time. "It is that," he agreed. "Almost it is like a day in my native Pennsylvania." White hair grew in a thick fringe around the lower half of his head. His bald crown, like his cherubic face, had a ruddy scrubbed look. His short body was dumpling-like with good living. Well-dressed, his appearance made a strong contrast beside the seedy scrawiness of Amos Burrick.

Burrick, however, was unaware of the difference. Only one thing made any impression upon him. That was having someone to talk to.

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"You find that relative of yours yet?" Burrick asked conversationally.

"My cousin Wilhelm?" Ten Eyck gave a somber shake of his head. "No, and the whole morning I have spent making inquiries. They told me it was here to this city that Wilhelm had come."

"The city's a big place," Burrick reminded.

"That, yes. But it has been a long time, and Wilhelm since may have left." Ten Eyck's rosy features became worried. "I know not what I shall do if I do not find Wilhelm. He was of the family the last. I have not much longer, and the crystal must to the next be passed on."

"The crystal," Burrick echoed significantly. He glanced at Ten Eyck with sudden slyness. "I still don't believe it can do all those thinks like you said the other day."

Ten Eyck gave a cherubic smile of confidence. "You do not believe it will cause spells in which you live again the past? But I promised to show it to you, did I not? To see is to believe."

"I sure would like to see it," Burrick said eagerly. He had been leading up to this, and now he reached quickly for his hat before Ten Eyck could change his mind.

"Come, then. It is but a short walk to my hotel." Ten Eyck placed his glasses carefully in a leather case and rose. Burrick followed, stifling a gasp as his rheumatic legs responded with a painful twinge.

Ten Eyck lived on a business street just across the park, in a small third-rate hotel which reflected his characteristic Dutch sense of thrift. The desk clerk payed little notice to either Burrick or Ten Eyck as he handed the latter his key.

There was no elevator. Burrick and Ten Eyck mounted a flight of stairs to the second floor. Ten Eyck's room was at the end of a narrow dark hall. He gestured Burrick inside and carefully locked the door.

"It is a risk I take, to live here," he told Burrick. "But they charge too much, the other places." He shrugged plump shoulders, and led Burrick to a chair beside a battered deal writing table. Then he pulled a bulging suitcase from under the bed, and went quickly through its contents. Finally he straightened, holding a small wooden box some three inches square. He stood quietly for a moment, regarding the box with a frown of deep thought.

"In my family this has been for many generations," he said at last. "Always it was passed on, from father to son—until now. I had no children, and Wilhelm was of my family the only one left." His reflective tone lowered. "How old is the crystal, I do not know. It was brought from India by one of my ancestors, a sea captain, at a time when Dutch ships sailed all the trade routes of the world. And already then it was very old."

As Burrick watched intently, Ten Eyck opened the box. From its padded interior he withdrew a blazing crystal octagon, which he placed before Burrick on the writing table.

BURRICK stared at the octagon in sudden awe. It glowed in rainbow splendor like some great jewel. Its light did not seem to be reflected, but rather a part of itself, as though its interior were filled with prismatic radiance. Gazing into it, Burrick abruptly discovered that its internal light did not glow steadily as did light from an electric bulb. It waned and brightened rythmically like the quick pulsing of an excited heart. And with each beat its mulitude of glorious colors flashed and changed in a never-ending play of vivid

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hues. The throbbing flame with its endless chromatic transformation held the eyes hynotically.

To Burrick, the room seemed to dim and fade away as he peered with breathless absorption into the depths of the octagon. He heard Ten Eyck speak again, but the other's voice came as though from a great distance.

"When one gazes at the crystal, into a spell he falls, and the events of his past life he lives again. If it is just a dream by the strange power of the crystal caused, or if one actually does in the past live again, I do not know. But it seems real—as real as the present."

Burrick was motionless in his chair, frozen. The room was gone. There was only the light in the octagon, pulsing, ever-changing, numbing in its sheer kaleidoscopic splendor. Through the last thin crack in the closing door of his awareness, a voice spoke—a thin ghost of sound that might have come from some far end of the universe.

"But in looking at the crystal, there is a danger. It drinks at the strength. It is as if the energy of the body and mind it uses to cause the dreams. One careful must be not to . . ."

The door had closed. The voice was silenced. Burrick floated in a warm pulsing sea of rainbow color. He had a sense of weightlessness, of infinite peace. Time had stopped. Life itself seemed suspended.

Then the throbbing world of color paled and faded. A grayness came. Through the grayness, far away but coming nearer, sounds stirred. Inchoate and confused at first, but after a moment Burrick was able to make out the crash of rifles and the roar of artillery.

The sounds seemed poignantly familiar. He strove to place them in memory. All at once recollection came.

Abruptly the grayness was gone. He crouched, one of a long line of men in battle-stained uniforms, behind the scanty underbrush at the slope of a long hill. His bayoneted rifle was hot in his hands from constant firing. A spot on his shoulder burned where a bullet had grazed him.

They were waiting he knew, just giving the enemy entrenched on the hill something to think about, and waiting. . . . Then the long-awaited signal came. A sudden thundering of horses hooves, and from off to his left a detachment of cavalry pounded into view, a flag fluttering at their head.

Even at this distance he recognized the Stars and Stripes. He forgot his burning thirst and the ache of his tired muscles. A fierce vibrant joy shot through him. He gripped his rifle tighter and looked up at the crest of the hill with eager eyes.

The thunder of the approaching horses shook the earth. A short chunky rider in the lead pounded for the slope, the sun glinting on his pince-nez glasses, his sword upraised. Burrick felt a surging thrill. It was Teddy, right out in front where he always was.

"Charge!"

The command rose above the tumult of battle. The shouted roar of exultant voices answered.

LIKE a shattering wave, the cavalry dashed itself against the hill and boiled upwards to the crest. Burrick followed through the choking dust, slipping, sliding, yelling like a demon. Then he was on the crest, panting, vibrant with the knowledge that a decisive victory had been won.

The battle of San Juan hill, and Burrick a teen-aged private in the Spanish-American War.

He lived it all over again. It was so vivid and real that it was like some-

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thing happening here and now, instead of something that had taken place in a dim and vanished yesterday.

One by one, the incidents of that golden era of his youth were recreated. The march into Manila . . . the return to the States . . . the parades and music. . . . All was very sharp and clear. It was as though time had never passed beyond the scenes occurring.

And then the grayness returned. Color and pulsing movement came into it. He was back in the rainbow sea—but it was fading.

Burrick opened his eyes. For a long moment he gazed about him uncomprehendingly. Then awareness of his surroundings washed over him in a cold wave of understanding. He was once more just a shabby old man in a shabby hotel room. Just a shabby old man without purpose or hope. Realization of this struck into him with bitter sharpness.

He sat up in his chair. It took quite an effort to accomplish the movement, for he felt strangely listless and weak. His strength seemed to have ebbed during the interval under the crystal's spell.

The room brimed with the shadows of evening. Ten Eyck stood patiently at the window, puffing at a large curve-stemmed pipe. He turned as the sounds of Burrick's awakening broke the quiet of the room.

"Well, *Mynheer* Burrick, are you now convinced?"

Burrick nodded with feeble vehemence. "That crystal thing is the Devil's own contraption."

"But was it not real?"

"A mite too real, maybe." Burrick surveyed wryly his scrawny wrinkled hands and threadbare garments. "Compared to the spell, this is like a bad dream."

Ten Eyck chuckled softly, then sobered. He watched Burrick intently for some seconds. He asked, "You feel all right?"

"Kind of worn out," Burrick answered.

"The crystal, it has that effect," Ten Eyck said. "As I have explained, one's own strength it uses to cause the spells."

Burrick nodded vaguely and glanced at the window. He felt a wrench of apprehension as he noticed suddenly that it was evening. He rose on unsteady legs and reached for his hat.

"I'll have to be going, Mr. Ten Eyck. It's past supper time, and Alma—that's my son's wife—is going to give me hell for being late. You'll be in the park tomorrow?"

Ten Eyck nodded. "I shall be in the city a few more days yet. The search for Wilhelm I cannot give up until convinced I am that he is not here."

BURRICK hurried home anxiously. As he had expected, Alma was shrill with anger over his tardiness.

"You're just an old bum," she accused. "All you're good for is eating and sleeping and gadding about. If you can't make yourself useful around the house, Lord knows the least you can do is come home to supper on time."

To make matters worse, Tom was not there to intercede for him as he usually did. Of course, Tom's help was rather half-hearted at best, but at least it was better than weathering the storm of Alma's tirades alone.

Alma, however, was not without a vestigial sympathy. After a while she calmed down enough to warm up for Burrick the supper leftovers, grumbling throughout the process about having to act as nursemaid to a worthless old man. In a hurry to escape from Alma's ill-tempered presence, Burrick gulped his food down quickly. He knew why

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his son, Tom, was absent from home so much. Tom claimed it was business, but the excuse was as good as any.

Finishing shortly, Burrick went up to his room in the attic. He undressed, donned a patched nightshirt and lay down on the hard cot that served him as a bed. He would have liked to listen to the radio a while, but that would have sent Alma into another fury. He knew only too well what she had to say on the subject of shiftless old men who listened to radios.

In the darkness, Burrick moved his bony shoulders in a shrug. He decided he could do without the radio if he had to. Slyly, he wondered if he could wheedle out of Tom in the morning the admission price to a movie. All Tom had from his pay was what Alma allowed him, but occasionally he managed to slip Burrick a few pieces of change.

Burrick felt a surge of self-pity. Fine life for an old man! Nobody to talk to, can't listen to the radio, no money for shows. He wished he were young again. Then he could work and do what he wanted.

Abruptly, he thought of Ten Eyck's crystal. Now there was something! Better than the radio, better than the movies. Better, even, than having someone to talk to. Almost as good, in fact, as being young again. He clutched at the thought of the crystal eagerly.

In the afternoon of the next day, Burrick hurried to the park. But it was not until almost evening that Ten Eyck appeared at the statue in the plaza.

They talked for a time. Ten Eyck admitted having had no success as yet in finding Wilhelm. Burrick cunningly led the conversation around to the crystal.

"I sure would like to see it again," he told Ten Eyck. "There's a lot in my younger days that I'd like to go over."

"You are sure you feel well?" Ten Eyck asked. "So soon after last night might not be good."

"I feel fine," Burrick insisted. "Never felt better, in fact."

Ten Eyck nodded reluctantly. "All right, then, I shall show the crystal to you once more."

"Tonight?" Burrick said. "I have to go home to supper now, but I'll sneak out afterwards."

"Tonight," Ten Eyck said. "I shall be at my hotel, waiting."

THAT evening, Burrick sat again at the writing table in Ten Eyck's room, gazing raptly into the blazing depths of the crystal. This time he went back to the days when he courted Marta, who subsequently became his wife. He'd had a good job, then, sporty clothes, and a horse and buggy that was the envy of his friend. Of all Burrick's memories, those of this period of his youth were the best. Good old days, lost along the road of years, but reborn under the crystal's spell. Once more, with Marta, he went for long rides under the summer moon, and attended the many well-remembered dances, picnics, and parties. It was all so real that when consciousness finally returned, Burrick felt more than ever that it was like falling into a bad dream than actually awakening.

Though exhausted by his sojourn under the spell, one thought was prominent in Burrick's mind—he had to see the crystal again. Within him the desire was as overpowering as an addict's hunger for drugs.

"I've got to see the crystal again," he told Ten Eyck. "Can I come back tomorrow?"

"But the danger!" Ten Eyck objected. "I have told you that looking

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at the crystal drains the strength. The body, fortunately, a sixth sense has, like an alarm clock, which breaks the spell when the drain too great becomes. But with too much of the crystal, this warning sense dulls, and one into a spell falls from which he never awakens."

"I've just got to see the crystal again!" Burrick insisted. "I'll feel all right by tomorrow."

Ten Eyck looked doubtful. "It is a risk. But if you are willing—" Abruptly he shrugged. "Tomorrow—so be it."

Exhausted but triumphant, Burrick returned home. It was late, and Alma reminded him of that fact scathingly. But now with something eagerly to look forward to, Burrick scarcely felt the acid of her rebukes. He mumbled a vague excuse and went up to his cot in the attic, where he fell into a heavy slumber.

Under the spell of the crystal, the next day, Burrick lived over incidents from his life as a boy. Once more he took forbidden swims in the abandoned stone quarry outside of town, went on week-end camping trips in the hills, and stole apples from the trees on Sim Crockett's farm. Like everything else he had experienced while under the spell, all was very vivid and real. He could actually taste the apples, feel the water against his skin, smell the burning pine branches, pungent on the crisp air of evening.

When he regained consciousness—feeling more fatigued this time than before—Burrick was now so strongly gripped by the fascinations of the crystal that he pleaded again with Ten Eyck to be allowed to return the next day. But Ten Eyck proved adamant. It was only after almost tearful urgings that Burrick managed to win Ten Eyck's consent to return the day after the next.

"And that the last time will be," Ten Eyck said. "Convinced I am that Wilhelm is in this city no longer. But two days more will I try, and then to Pennsylvania I shall return."

Burrick went rigid with dismay. "You mean you're taking the crystal with you—that I won't be able to see it any more?"

"But naturally," Ten Eyck said.

"You can't—you mustn't!" Burrick wailed, with an anguished feeling of loss. The crystal had come to mean everything to him—the companionship he didn't have, the radio he couldn't listen to, the movies he couldn't afford. It was a key which unlocked the golden door of the past to give life new brightness and meaning. And now it was going to be taken away from him.

BURRICK did not realize that his emotions were based on psychological principles. The old live in the past. In the present there is only ill-health and loneliness, the gray drabness of existence without living. In the future there is only death. The past, with its glorious memories of youth, has enchantment and glamor.

The crystal had provided Burrick with a means of recreating the past with all the vivid semblance of actuality. In a way, it had been like possessing the ability to go back and live one's past life all over again. This had been one of Burrick's fondest dreams—as it all too often is among the old. And once having been able very nearly to do so, Burrick quailed in horror at the mere thought of being forced to stop.

Burrick grasped Ten Eyck's arms imploringly. "Please, Mr. Ten Eyck, don't go so soon. Stay a few days more. The crystal—I've got to see the crystal again."

Ten Eyck shook his head firmly. "To leave, my mind is made up. An incon-

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venience it would be to stay in the city longer."

"Then . . . then why not leave the crystal with me?" Burrick suggested in sudden cunning. "I could send it back to you later on."

Ten Eyck shook his head again, and with more vigor than before. "I am sorry, *Mynheer* Burrick, that I cannot do. The crystal in the family must stay. There are certain old stories—" Ten Eyck broke off with an abrupt gesture. A shadow crept into his blue eyes, and his ruddy features tightened. "What you ask is impossible. I must return home—and the crystal with me goes. The day after tomorrow, you shall see it the last time."

Gazing at the other's set expression, Burrick knew that further pleading was useless. Filled with an empty coldness at the thought of having to resume his former cheerless existence, he left.

As he weakly plodded home, Burrick revolted more and more at being deprived of the crystal. Within him a burning resentment arose that Ten Eyck should be so unsympathetic. And quite suddenly he found himself hating Ten Eyck with a bitter virulent hatred. Ten Eyck had money, freedom—everything. Why did he have to be so stingy where the crystal was concerned? Couldn't he understand that it made up for all the things Burrick didn't and could never hope to have?

Burrick brooded constantly on the impending loss of the crystal, and by the following day his hatred of Ten Eyck coalesced into a plan for murder. By killing Ten Eyck, he would come into possession of the crystal. It would be his—his with which to delve into the golden past any time he wanted to. The unhappy tedium of the present would forever be broken.

Burrick's plan was quite simple. When he visited Ten Eyck again, he would wait until an opportunity presented itself and dispatch the other in some way which would not raise an alarm. Then he would take the crystal and leave. The desk clerk paid little or no attention to him, being familiar with seedy people, and at best could give the police only a vague description. He was not known in that part of the city, and thus did not have to fear that some chance acquaintance would witness his departure from the hotel. This was just an affair between Ten Eyck and himself, and with Ten Eyck out of the way, he would have nothing to worry about.

AS TO how the deed itself was going to be done, Burrick was already decided on that point. A gun would have made too much noise—even if he did have one. A knife, if he were to take one from home, would have been missed. He settled on a length of rusty lead pipe which he found in a trash-heaped corner of the basement at home. The pipe had an elbow joint on one end, and made an excellent hammer-like bludgeon.

Burrick was quite determined. Yet when he presented himself for the last time at Ten Eyck's shabby hotel room, his heart pounded suffocatingly and his stomach was a hard knot of tension. He thought that Ten Eyck must surely notice his nervous manner and be warned.

But Ten Eyck did not notice. His mind was obviously taken up with the details of leaving. He nodded abstractedly at Burrick, gestured at the chair before the writing table, and turned to pull from under the bed the suitcase in which he kept the crystal.

This was the exact moment upon which Burrick had decided for going into action. From the right sleeve of his threadbare jacket where he had been hiding it, the elbow joint resting in his

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palm, Burrick shook the length of lead pipe. It looked like some barbarian's grotesque war club as he gripped it tightly in his sweating hand. His breath came with difficulty, as t h o u g h he breathed through many layers of cloth. Excitement made the blood roar in his ears.

From the suitcase, Ten Eyck removed the familiar small wooden box. He started to straighten up. Behind him, Burrick crept up on unsteady legs, the length of lead pipe raised high. The utter horror of what he was going to do pulled Burrick forward as though in a trance. Wide and staring, his eyes were fixed on Ten Eyck's head.

As if having sensed Burrick behind him, Ten Eyck abruptly turned while still in the act of straightening up. His cherubic features twisted into a pale mask of terror as he saw the up-raised club.

Burrick acted out of the sheer fright of having been discovered. The muscles in his arm contracted spasmodically, and the pipe swept down in a clumsy chopping stroke. Ten Eyck managed frantically to jerk aside at just the right moment, and the elbow joint merely grazed the side of his head.

Pulled out of balance by the instinctive swing of his arm, Burrick collided with Ten Eyck's kneeling form and fell over his shoulders onto the bed. Ten Eyck grasped Burrick's legs in a terrified clutch and struggled to rise to his feet. In panic, Burrick sought to kick free, but he succeeded only in pulling Ten Eyck back to his knees. Moaning with dread, Ten Eyck clung in desperation to Burrick's legs.

Twisting around on the bed, Burrick clawed himself into a sitting position. Once again, Ten Eyck was trying to rise. Suddenly mad with fear at the thought of failure, Burrick clubbed repeatedly at Ten Eyck's head. It seemed unreal, fantastic, like something out of a horrible nightmare. The sobbing gibbering thing that clutched insensately at his legs . . . raising the pipe up, bringing it down, up and down, over and over, again and again . . . the b r e a t h jammed in his throat, the blood thundering and pounding in his ears.

Burrick went almost crazy with despair. How much longer did he have to keep hitting. Wouldn't Ten Eyck ever die?

It was only after a long moment that he finally realized that the frenzied grip on his legs had loosened. Ten Eyck was dead.

Burrick rose weakly. Noticing that his trousers were spotted with blood, he brushed them quickly with a corner of the disarranged bed blanket. Then, seizing the wooden box from where it had fallen on the worn rug, Burrick left the room.

Apparently, the struggle had drawn no attention. The hotel was quiet. Moving slowly through a supreme effort of will, Burrick walked down the stairs and across the lobby. The desk clerk was reading a magazine. He did not raise his head as Burrick went out the door.

NO ONE was home when Burrick reached there. Alma and the children had gone to a movie. He went up to his cot in the attic and lay down. He felt almost sick with nervous exhaustion.

After a while, Burrick quieted. The business was over with—and he had successfully got away with it. The crystal was now his. Triumphant elation surged through him at the thought. Strength and Purpose rushed back to him.

Burrick turned on a light, and eagerly took the crystal from its box. It blazed gloriously in his hands. Pulling up a

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trunk that served him as a table, he placed the crystal upon it, then sat down on the bed. He stared into the depths of the crystal hungrily, anxious to escape in its spell the livid memory of what he had just done.

The pulsing sea of rainbow color crept up around him. He sank gratefully into its warm embrace. The grayness came . . . dissolved. He was sitting on a lumpy bed in a shabby hotel room. A mewling thing had his legs in a desperate vise-like clutch, and he was clubbing at it, again and again, over and over, and it refused to die. Up and down with the pipe, up and down, over and over, and it sobbed and moaned, and wouldn't die. His lungs bursting for breath, the blood shrieking and clanging in his head. Unutterable terror giving an insane strength to his flailing arm. Over and over, again and again. Wouldn't it ever end? Wouldn't the thing ever die?

Over and over, again and again, up and down, and up and down. . . .

And then he was brushing at his trousers, forcing himself to walk slowly from the hotel. Climbing up to his cot in the attic, waiting for energy and calmness to return. Pulling up the trunk, looking into the crystal. . . .

Burrick awoke, weak, numbed with horror. He stared at the crystal as though it were the embodiment of every fear he had ever known. A great cold hand seemed to close around him. What had happened? Why did the crystal no longer bring to life the happy memories of his youth?

Abruptly, Burrick recalled Ten Eyck's insistence that the crystal had to stay in his family, and the fearful shadow which had crept into Ten Eyck's face at his unfinished reference to "certain old stories". Was it that ownership of the crystal by others than those of the Ten Eyck family resulted in a frightful perversion of its powers? From what Burrick had just experienced while under its spell, this seemed to be the answer.

Burrick gazed at the crystal with sudden loathing. If he would undergo a repetition of his murder of Ten Eyck each time he looked at it, then it would have to be destroyed.

And now. Before Alma and Tom came home.

CAREFUL not to look at it directly, Burrick picked up the crystal and hurried down to the basement. He placed it upon a wooden chopping block, then obtained a large heavy hammer from the tool chest. He pounded the crystal into powdery fragments. With a broom, he carefully swept the dust onto a shovel and dumped it in the ash barrel.

Burrick sighed in relief. That was that. Nobody could ever connect him with Ten Eyck's death now. He returned to the attic. As he sat down on the cot preparatory to removing his shoes, a brightness caught his eye. He sought for it puzzledly. He found it. His heart seemed to turn over inside him.

On the trunk, pulsing, glowing with prismatic splendor, was the crystal!

Burrick stared at it. Before he could resist, he was sinking into the throbbing rainbow sea. And then he was back in that shabby hotel room, sitting on the bed, while a mewling thing held his legs in a desperate vise-like clutch. He was clubbing at it, again and again, over and over, and it refused to die. Up and down with the pipe, up and down, over and over. . . .

Burrick opened his eyes. He was covered with perspiration. A tight band seemed to have closed over his chest, making it hard to breathe. His heart had a strange fluttery beat. The out-

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lines of his attic room shimmered crazily.

A deluge of sudden fright impelled him into motion. The crystal! He had to get rid of it. He reached for it, avoiding its treacherous splendor. He stood up, swayed, fell back on the cot. He was appalled to find how weak he had become.

He had to get rid of the crystal. The thought beat at him. But he was too weak to go back down to the basement. What could he do?

Burrick glanced hopelessly around the room. His eyes settled upon the windows at the rear of the attic. That was it! The windows were open. He could hurl the crystal out into the night.

Burrick forced himself to his feet. Tottering, staggering, as though drunk, he made his uncertain way over to the windows. Summoning his last dregs of strength, he threw the crystal outside. Then he crept back slowly and painfully to the cot.

With weary listlessness, Burrick began to remove his jacket. Something bright caught his eye. He looked—and the world spun in chaos around him.

*On the trunk, pulsing, glowing with prismatic splendor, was the crystal!*

He fought its spell, fought it frantically—but he was too weak to resist. The throbbing rainbow sea claimed him. And then he was back in that shabby hotel room, sitting on the bed, while a mewling thing held his legs in a desperate vise-like clutch. And he was beating at it, again and again, over and over, and it refused to die. Up and down with the pipe, up and down, over and over. . . .

And this time, with his last reserves of life force drained from him, there was no awakening. There was just a great cold blackness that came and never went away.

## BENEATH THE BILLOWING WAVES

STRETCH your imagination to its limits, conjure up all the terrifying pictures of which you are capable, even look closely at the picture that flashed before your eyes after a little too much imbibing,—and even then all your imaginative pictures will not compare with the living creatures that actually exist far below the surface of the sea. Hollywood, in its most extreme horror film has not been able to recreate those gleaming serpent forms, the blind creatures that crawl and grope in the darkness in their black, slimy skins.

Picture, for example, the "black swallower," a sea animal that is nearly all mouth. It exists in its habitat several miles below the surface. Because of its peculiar structure it is able to devour fishes twelve times as large as itself. Simply by climbing over the intended victim with one jaw and then another, it is able to force down fish after fish to satisfy its immense hunger.

The bitterest enemy of the "black swallower" is its own ravenous appetite. After feasting on too many fish, it will die from indigestion.

There are other surprising creatures to be found on the ocean's bottom. There is the so called "oar-fish," forty feet long, which is said to swim as fast as an express train. There is Regalecus, a sea serpent which sometimes grows to twenty feet in length. Moreover there are other giant monsters that make a single meal of creatures such as Regalecus!

Of great interest to the deep sea student, are the "lamplighter" animals that have rows of phosphorus lights along each side. Some of them have a whip-like projection above their head on the end of which glows a real lantern, a small bulb producing phosphorus light. Other fish, attracted by the gleaming light, are lured into the enormous mouth of the "lamplighter" that is always ready and waiting for the victim. To make the picture even more grotesque, these creatures are blind; nature, it seems, has compensated by another sense to permit it to exist.

These sea creatures, all of them inhabiting the lower levels of the ocean, constantly seek new food. Sometimes they venture too high up into another zone of ocean life and are forced upward to reach the surface almost dead. It is mainly in this manner that they reach the attention of the scientist so that he can examine at first hand the inhabitants of the sea regions which he has been unable to penetrate. What other monsters exist, we can only guess; these we have seen are by no means "lords of the sea," we can assume that *we ain't seen nuthin' yet.—R. Clayton.*

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It was no man, it was Death the youths of the council saw in the doorway



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# THE SWORD AND THE POOL

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

**Out of the pool came a sword and its mission was one of blood and the relief of oppression for a whole people**

McALLIS rubbed the stem of the pipe across the stubble on his chin and sighed reflectively.

"So you decided that the best way to see the world is to tramp it, is that it, Litmer?" he asked.

Ralph Litmer grinned at the banty Scotsman and replied:

"That's right. Of course I didn't have too much money to begin with. I

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have to admit that the money angle was a prime factor in any plans I made."

McAllis regarded the tall, young man standing at his side, with somber, intent look. He thought, "Poor fella! What a drubbing you're in for. Some damn fool tells them that the only way to see things is to get on a cheap boat carryin' cargo, and beat it from port to port." Aloud, he said, "And how do you like it?"

Litmer started to give the pat answer, that it was all so wonderful, that he was having the time of his life, and noticed how searching was McAllis' gaze.

"Not quite the fun I thought it'd be," he said softly. Suddenly his voice rose, "Why the devil can't they keep these boats more clean? Or treat those poor devils down there in the engine room like humans? Why—"

"Now, lad." McAllis put his hand on Litmer's forearm gently. He felt the tightness of drawn muscles. "Now, lad," he said again. "I know how you feel. Sure you're surprised that I say that." Litmer had started at McAllis' words. "Did you think I have no feel for those things? Thirty years I've spent a'sea. It's a long time. No. I was going to say that that's the way of the sea. But it isn't true. There are ships and men. And each reflects what goes into its making. Like the *Galway Queen,* here.

"They built it to make money! Damn the comfort or the bodies and souls of those running her. Bring us the profits! And so they hired the scum and dregs of a half-dozen ports and manned her with them. That's why it stinks. That's why they use Lascars. That's way—but what's the use of going on? Damn this heat!"

He wiped his face with a balled-up hunk of waste. A wide streak of oil or dirt came away from the waste and was transferred to his face. "I always hated Bombay," he said in a tight voice.

Litmer could understand that about the heat but the reference to Bombay was beyond him. McAllis explained:

"It's where the west meets the east and neither benefits from the meeting. Gin-soaked E n g l i s h m e n and their skinny, dried-out wives. Rich Mahrattas looking down their noses at the same Englishmen who in turn look down their noses at the Hindus. And in between, the native Untouchables being ground out between English imperialism and their own native customs. Did you ever see the cotton mills they have here?" He answered his own question, "But of course you haven't. Well, in the morning, I'm going to take you on a tour of the native quarters and the manufacturing districts."

Litmer's eyes widened at the vehemence in McAllis' voice. More, he was surprised at the sudden change from the slurring Scot's way of speech to the cultured tones of the educated man. There was more to McAllis than met the eye.

Litmer looked toward the lighted bay area of Bombay and asked:

"How long do you think we'll lay here?"

"Hard to say," the engineer answered. "Maybe a day. And maybe a week. All depends how long it's going to take to get that bearing in."

LITMER was silent and after a few seconds, McAllis left him. The tall, blond-haired man stood at the rail and thought deeply on the why and what had made him come to this end of the world. He knew only that some vast urging, inexplicable yet more compelling than anything he had ever known, had made him pull up stakes, take leave of the excellent job he had, and embark on this adventure. Now he had traveled more than half-way around the world and the explanation for all this had still not come to him. He only knew that he

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had to go on. That somewhere in the great beyond there lay the reason for it. And that he would find it.

He sighed deeply and, turning made his way toward the cubby hole, dark, small and dirty, that was his stateroom. As he moved aft, he heard the murmur of voices. Some of the black gang were on deck. His lips tightened as he approached them. They were so like animals. Satisfied with a bowl of rice, they worked sixteen, eighteen hours in the depths and darkness of the engine room, sweating and straining at their tasks. And only McAllis treated them as humans. The other officers treated them as though they were animals, expressly sent to them for the purpose of work.

He was perhaps twenty feet from the murmuring voices when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps from the other side. One of the officers was coming his way. He slowed his steps for some reason, and dawdled against the rail. The moon came out from behind a bank of clouds just then and etched the scene in brilliant relief. There were eight members of the black gang. Their only dress were breech-clouts. Their slender, wiry, muscular bodies glistened with oil and sweat. Litmer's eye was caught by one of the men. He was one of the most magnificent specimens of man he had ever seen. Even stretched out full length, as he was, Litmer saw that he was a giant. And while the others were of that even brown in color, this man was ebony, gleaming blackness. He turned his face for a second and Litmer saw his teeth sparkle in immaculate whiteness. Then the other man was on them. Perhaps it was that the moon had lost itself again behind the clouds just then or perhaps it was just the innate meanness of the other which brought on the incident. At any rate, he stumbled against the body of the giant.

"Blasted, bloody heathen," the officer screamed. And his booted foot thumped loudly as it struck heavily into the unprotected flesh. "Hi told yer ta stay off'n the deck, damn yer black souls! Now take that! And that!" And with each word he kicked wildly and savagely at the inert body.

Litmer acted instinctively. He was clad in sneakers, so that his attack was silent. The white man didn't know of his presence until Litmer's flying body struck him. There was nothing he could have done about it then. Savage fists, swinging with all the backing and power of a hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle hit him. He went backward as one of the blows almost lifed him from his feet. Nor did Litmer give him a second to catch his balance. The other's hands went up and in that instant, Litmer drove a lightning right to the man's chin. It was the pay-off punch.

Litmer had acted through instinct. The very suddenness of it all precluded the possibility of thought. But now as he saw the face of the man at his feet, he was glad that he done what he did. For the moon revealed the features of the most hated man on ship, the man they called Black Limey, the second mate. Litmer had come into contact with him before. He had seen him strike men before. And always it had needed no reason, no excuse. Black Limey struck simply for the sheer joy of inflicting pain.

THE voices had stilled when Litmer's flying body came into the scene. Now they rose shrill in jumbled sound. Only the giant black was silent. But in the look he gave Litmer there was a world of thankfulness. Softly, he said, "I shall never forget, white man. There will be a day when I shall rule. And when that day comes . . ."

Litmer had turned again to look down

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at the unconscious man just as the black began to talk. Now he jerked his head back toward the giant. The words had been spoken in English. But before he could ask in natural curiosity how the other had learned to speak English, the man at his feet stirred, groaned and opened his eyes. With that the Lascars stood quickly and silently and quickly made their way to the companionway which led below to the engine room.

"Ow!" the officer groaned as he sat up. "Well, damme!" he said in furious anger as full consciousness returned and he saw Litmer standing above him. Swiftly, he arose. But when Litmer made no show of retreating, the other only stood still and looked his venom at him.

"There was no reason for that," Litmer said quietly. "They were only up here for a bit of air."

"Hought to stay below, black devils," the officer said. "Hand what right you got to hinterfere?"

Litmer grunted and started past the other. Just as he reached him, Black Limey put out a restraining hand.

"Look Yank. H'it'd be better fer ya hif yer minded yer own business, see," he said.

Litmer jerked himself loose and turned a savage countenance to the other. "Listen!" he said in quiet yet commanding tones. "I've been wanting to pound that ugly puss of yours for a long time. You're just lucky that this was the first chance I've had. The next time I'll do a real job."

Litmer didn't wait to hear any more. He didn't hear the low, ugly voice of the other say, "Next time, me bucko, ye won't have the chance."

MOONLIGHT filtered in the porthole and splashed against the bunk on which Ralph Litmer tossed. The sheet was literally wet from his perspiration. He wore only the pants to his pajamas. The tiny cabin held a heat that was stifling.

Muttering an imprecation again, the infernal humidity of India, Litmer arose. He started for the tiny washstand in the corner, then changed his mind and opened the door to the cabin. A rush of damp air met him and made the perspiration run down his chest in rivulets. There was the mystic and muted sound that always seemed to come from the bowels of ships. A sort of grunting strain which manifested itself through every fibre of a vessel. He listened with straining attention for any other sound but only the deep silence answered him.

He looked back at his damp bunk and hesitated, as if he were deciding whether to chance lying down on it again. But when he saw the clear, wet imprint of his body, he closed the door.

For once the deck was silent and empty. The moon was gone and Bombay in the near distance was not as light as it had been when he and McAllis had their illuminating talk. A breeze had come up in the few hours which had elapsed but it held no relief from the torrid, enervating dampness. Still it was a breeze. Litmer drank deeply of it.

He had not heard anything. Yet suddenly he went tense. There was another presence on deck. Cautiously Litmer slid around the shelter of a companionway and peered from behind it, down the length of the deck. It was empty. He started to turn away and stopped. Something had moved along the rail.

He peered through narrowed eyelids and when he saw who it was that had been pressed against the rail, he ran lightly and silently toward the man. It was the giant black. Litmer reached him just as the man was poised on the rail.

"Wait a minute, y'damn fool," Litmer grunted as he reached up and

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hauled at the other.

The black kicked wildly at Litmer's clutching hands. For a second, the white man's fingers slid down the sweaty feet. Then they caught at an ankle. And before the black could swing loose, Litmer hauled him down.

The effort cost them both invitiated energy. Litmer got up from the deck and surveyed the other grimly.

"What the idea?" he asked.

The giant's face was so black that Litmer could not make it out too well. Then the black grinned and his teeth were a shining mark in the darkness. The tenseness was relieved with the smile. The black came away from the rail and stood beside Litmer.

"Well," Litmer asked again. "What was the idea?"

"The water," the other said. "It looked so cool."

"And so filthy," Litmer added. "Is this your idea of a place to take a swim?"

Statuesque shoulders heaved in a shrug. "I felt the need of wetness besides that of my own sweat," the black replied.

LITMER walked to the rail and looked down at the murky depths below. It didn't look inviting. He shook his head and came back. He was alone again. The night had swallowed the black. Litmer looked about him, bewildered. But the other was gone. Suddenly, Litmer felt the need of company. The darkness and quiet enveloped him in wrappings of menace. Why he felt this queer sensation of panic, Litmer couldn't say. But he *knew*, as if there had been words of warning, that there was menace in the air.

He shivered, though the air was hot, and walked to the companionway leading to the engine room.

As he went down the rungs of the ladder he felt the muted sound which had come into his cabin, a thousandfold louder. Now the whole ship echoed the tune of power. Then he was in the black depths below ship and making his way amid-ship by the light of the over-hanging electric light bulbs.

An odor, compounded of human sweat and machine oil, came to his nostrils. He sniffed loudly and wrinkled his nostrils at the acrid smell. A hammering, pounding sound came to his ears. It grew louder as he came forward. Then he reached a scene of confusion. McAllis, at the head of a crew, was standing in ankle-deep bilge. Above were gathered oilmen and the men of the engine room. Litmer saw the room-high housing which held the broken bearing, on the floor. Above and concealed from his eyes was the scene of the pounding. McAllis turned and saw Litmer and motioned him over.

"What's the matter, lad? Can't sleep?" he asked.

Litmer nodded.

McAllis motioned to that above them. "Getting it set," he said. "The Skipper wants to get out of here by morning."

"What's the hurry?" asked Litmer, mildly.

"Cargo's on board. And we've got to pick up more in Calcutta. So bearing or not, we've got to get out."

A voice shouted down from above:

"Send up one o' those black devils with a sledge!"

"Hemet!" McAllis shouted.

Litmer was startled to see the giant black step from behind a large crate. So his name was Hemet. McAllis said something to him in a language Litmer didn't understand. Hemet replied in the same tongue and started up the ladder which reached to the opening in the huge generator they were working in.

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"Hindustani," McAllis replied to the question in Litmer's eyes. "Had to learn it to get the work out of these Lascars. That or get an interpreter."

Litmer was struck by a sudden idea. He wanted to see what the inside of the generator looked like.

"Mind if I get up there?" he asked.

"Go right ahead."

Litmer followed the path taken by the black. He was amazed at the size of the generator. There were four men working inside it, one holding the immense bearing in place, one standing by, another beside a large bag of tools, and Hemet, the forty pound sledge in one hand, preparing to swing it against the steel bearing when the second mate gave the word.

LITMER edged his way forward until he was only a few feet from Hemet. The second mate stood to the right of the black. And while the Lascar held the bearing in place, the mate called off the strokes. Litmer noticed that the black was standing on a narrow bit of steel walk. Below him, some forty feet was the bottom of the generator. And while the mate counted off the strokes, Litmer saw him edge toward the black. He wondered what the mate was up to. Then it happened.

The mate called, "Now." And with the word, and while the black swung the heavy sledge, he stepped forward and kicked at the black's ankle at the very instant the black swung.

But the black didn't fall. For Litmer had anticipated the mate's action. And even as the mate had stepped forward, Litmer had moved also. Hemet teetered wildly for a second. Then Litmer's steadying hand held him erect. Litmer was conscious of the drama of the tableaux which prevailed for the next few seconds. It was broken by the mate, who, with a grunt of anger, his face twisted in hatred, reached for the knife which nestled in its sheath. The narrow ledge of steel didn't hold room for fancy footwork. Already the mate, maddened by the sudden switch in his plans, was swinging the knife. Litmer threw up his hand, the palm on edge and hooked hard toward the descending knife. There was a sharp crack as the palm met the mate's wrist. Then, teetering madly, just as Hemet did, the mate began a tight rope dance to preserve his balance. Only there was no Litmer to save him. He teetered back and forth for a few seconds, then toppled forward.

Strangely, Litmer felt no emotion as he watched the mate land in the oil, bilge and filth at the bottom of the generator. Not even when he knew that the man was injured. For he did not rise when he hit. Hemet turned to him and said, "Once more. And this time it could have been my life. I will triumph soon. Perhaps then . . ."

That was twice that he had uttered cryptic words, words without plain meaning, as though only he knew their intent, yet spoke as if the words had a meaning for all.

"I'd better let McAllis know what happened," Litmer said.

He watched the three men carry the unconscious figure of the mate down the ladder. As he turned to leave, McAllis said:

"From the looks of him, he'll be out for a while. I'm worried, though about what he'll say when he comes to. The Skipper's a strange man and might not take kindly to a passenger's interference. Not even to save a man's life."

"Then damn the Skipper," Litmer said. "And you can tell him I said so."

"Maybe we won't have to do that, lad. I think I can manage the Limey. As for you, you'd better get to bed. I'll call you in the morning and we'll see

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the city."

LITMER was conscious first of the heat, then of the swarm of life that was one of the native quarters of Bombay. He had assumed that all Hindus were short. Now he saw only a certain segment of the native population were slight of build. And as they strolled through the narrow, twisting streets, McAllis pointed out the different types to be seen.

There were tall, lithe, arrogantly strutting Pathans, giant Sikhs, bearded, somber-faced with a look of dignity about them that was eye-compelling. Then there were the Ghurkas, warriors who spent most of their grown life in the service of the King. And always, the small-statured, self-effacing Hindu, scurrying about the narrow streets, dodging the Pathans, jabbering in bazar doorways, arguing in their high, shrill tongues on street corners.

Litmer was bewildered by the display of life.

"I had always thought that the Hindu was a somber man," he said.

The engineer smiled. "You're like most westerners," he said. "They see a movie or newspaper picture and they assume what you did. What they don't realize is that the Hindu has certain feelings of propriety which are not like ours. Here in the bazaar they are what you see. And just like any other people they can laugh and be light-hearted. But only among themselves. Or with someone they trust."

They were walking side by side, despite the narrowness of the street. Litmer had his head turned to McAllis. So it was that he did not realize they had arrived at an intersection. And when McAllis turned inward he jostled Litmer who stumbled momentarily and fell against someone coming their way.

"Oh! Why, you—you clumsy fool!" a girl's pain-filled voice said.

Litmer stepped back, covered with confusion. She was a pretty girl, wearing a white silk dress, sleeveless and with a low neckline.

"I beg your pardon," he said hastily in apology. "I hope I didn't hurt you."

She shook her head quickly and the brightly colored ribbon which held her hair in place and looked like a rainbow-colored pigtail bobbed with the motion of her head.

"No," she said. "And I'm sorry I said what I did. It was the surprise of our meeting, I suppose. But you are clumsy."

Litmer found himself grinning down at her. She had smiled and he saw that she had buck teeth, not too much, but enough to lend to her features which otherwise were without blemish, a look that was somehow childish. It was as if she had rebelled against going to the dentist when she was young.

"Yes," Litmer went on. "And big too." He didn't want her to go away. Suddenly he wanted her to stay and talk to him. Or if she were to go, he knew that he was going to follow her.

He felt the sharp elbow of McAllis nudging him. He paid no attention to it, nor to the murmured words of the engineer, "Come lad. We have things to see."

She turned her bright glance to the sandy-haired Scotsman, who turned his look shyly from her.

LITMER found and heard himself saying and doing something he had never thought of doing. Although he was a handsome man by any standard, well-bred, and with an air which had caught many a girl's eye, he had never had much to do with the opposite sex.

"Look," he began. "Aren't you a bit frightened, I mean, a white woman walking alone among all these. Well!

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What I'm trying to say is, would you mind if we accompanied you?"

"I don't see why you should," she said. "Nor do I see why you shouldn't," she added.

"Then it's settled!" Litmer almost shouted. "Come on Mac. . . I'm sorry. You don't even know who we are. This is James McAllis and I'm Ralph Litmer."

"And I'm Sheila Grant," she said.

"Sheila Gr-rant," McAllis said slowly.

Litmer's smile disappeared. There was something in the engineer's tone. Something about the way he slurred the *r's* in her name that told him something was wrong.

"Yes," she said.

"Your-r father-r is not the man who has the cotton mills, now?"

Her answer came on a rising note, "Yes?"

"Then ye'll not walk with the likes of James McAllis, a laboring man," the engineer announced in clipped tones.

Litmer whirled the little man about. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Her father does not hire human beings," McAllis said softly, bitterly. "He hires slaves to work at the looms and wheels. Look at her. See for yourself, lad."

Litmer turned to look at her and as quickly turned back to McAllis.

"So what?" he asked. "Does that give you the right to insult her? Does that give *you* the right to act less the man?"

He felt the touch of cool fingers on his forearm. When he turned he saw the wetness in her eyes. He saw her throat contract as she forced back a sob. Then she said, "He's right, Ralph. Better go with him."

"Wait, lass."

They both turned to look at McAllis. His florid features were brick-red. "I'm an old fool," he said in hurried, stumbling tones. "And a blind one. Visiting the sins . . . ye'll say ye'll forgive me?"

Her face became radiant.

"Yes! Of course I will. And what you say about my father is true. Only—"

"Then what are we standing around for?" Litmer demanded, as he took her arm. "Let's go places. Your places," he continued grinning happily down at her.

LITMER looked up at the canopy-covered front and wrinkled his brow in surprise. Sheila had led them down one of the narrow streets until they wound up before the restaurant that was her goal. The interior was dark and also cool. There was no door. He poked his head inquiringly into the darkness and was rewarded by a draft of cool air. And also by various acrid though not unpleasant odors. Then the girl was urging them forward.

They squatted on their haunches before a low, wide table. A half-dozen oil lamps served for illumination. Litmer saw that the interior was much larger than he had imagined it to be from the glimpse he had from the open doorway. And crowded to capacity.

It took a few seconds for their eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. When they did, Litmer was surprised to see Hemet seated at one of the tables. There was another man with him. Litmer looked at McAllis questioningly and the other, following Litmer's glance saw Hemet.

"They all were given liberty," he said in answer to the unspoken question. "As I told you this morning when we left, that bearing didn't fit. So we're tied up here for another day."

Sheila was all attention.

"What's all this?" she asked.

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Litmer launched into a long explanation of how and why he was in Bombay. She listened avidly, as if there was wonder in his tale for her. McAllis' pale blue eyes watched the two and he smiled as he listened to them. They were like two children who had suddenly come into a wondrous secret and were sharing it to the exclusion of everyone. He went through the ritual of filling his pipe and lighting it, a ritual which had never before failed to give Litmer delight, but for once, now, he didn't even see.

In the midst of lighting his pipe he paused, then slowly inhaled at the smoke. His ears, attuned to the sound of softly purring engines had heard the barely audible words at a table not far from theirs. It was the table at which Hemet and his friend sat. The two men were speaking in Hindustani.

"How soon?" Hemet had asked.

"Not long. The hour approaches and the way is prepared," the other had answered.

Then Hemet broke into a tongue that was strange to McAllis. Repressed excitement lifted his voice higher than usual. In the midst of the stream of foreign sounds, McAllis heard a few words which were understandable.

". . . . the long-dead will come to life. The promise will be kept."

Suddenly all sound was stilled in the cafe. Only the man and woman opposite McAllis continued in their intimate, low-voiced talk. Only they had not heard the most dreaded word in this world, *fire!*

McAllis swiveled his head toward the opening to the cafe. He saw a stream of people shoot past and heard the crackle of flames. The fire was close by. Already several men nearest the door had arisen and were edging their way to the exit. It was their waiter who touched off the spark of panic, however. The tray he was balancing on his shoulders dropped to the floor with a crash, and his voice rose in a terrified echo of the sound from the outside. It was the signal for bedlam to break loose. There was but a single exit, that same door which led to the interior, and those within made a concerted and simultaneous effort to reach that opening to safety. As a result there were a few who got through. The rest just jammed, screaming and cursing, a solid and impenetrable mass of humanity, not a single member of which could get out. Their panic was so great that no words, no coercion could have penetrated past the fear of their souls.

THE three whites had also arisen at the waiter's scream. But they had the presence of mind not to follow the rest. Litmer held the girl's arm tightly. McAllis, tense and watchful was listening with straining senses. Then he heard it. The crackle of fire. And hearing it knew that it was close. And knew also that it would be a matter of a few moments before it would reach them. For the buildings in the quarter they were in were constructed of wood and tar-paper. His hawk-look happened to turn in the direction of Hemet and his friend. His eyes widened when he saw that they were still sitting. More, they each held the same expression, that of wary watchfulness.

The two arose and moved silently and swiftly, not as the others had done, to the door, but to the wall. And McAllis, as though he had divined in their move the reason for it, grasped at Litmer's sleeve and started after the two. Litmer and the girl followed without an instant's hesitation.

They almost trod on Hemet's heels so close were they behind the two men. Hemet turned and saw them. For the barest second his face turned fierce and

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resentful. Then he recognized Litmer. As his friend pushed at the wall, Hemet motioned with his head for the three to follow.

As if by magic the wall sprang open to reveal a tunnel-like passage. McAllis, the last through, turned for a last look and was horrified to see that smoke was curling into the restaurant. And even as Litmer pulled at him, he saw the first bright flash of the all-enveloping flames reach the packed door. The wall closed on the first stricken screams.

They walked on stone. They knew that because they could hear the clump of their feet. But that was all they knew, for they walked in impenetrable darkness. McAllis wondered as he stumbled along, bumping now and then into the figure of the girl in front of him, how the two who were in the lead managed to walk with such surety. Hemet's voice came back to them:

"Be not afraid. You will be safe."

Then the other said something in the same strange tongue in which he and Hemet had been talking. Hemet answered in a monosyllabic reply, then in English, commanded:

"Come close. And whatever happens, do not be afraid."

McAllis wondered what was to happen that required a reiterated request not to be afraid. The answer was not long in coming. Suddenly, McAllis bumped into the girl. She was standing close to Litmer who had also stopped when he bumped into the figure in front of him. They stood in a silence which lasted for several seconds and which was finally broken when Hemet said, "There. The light on the wall." He spoke in Hindustani.

They saw it then, a faint phosphorescent glow on the wall.

"Let each of you clasp the other's hand," Hemet said.

The three whites were puzzled by all this mumbo-jumbo. Litmer had the thought that all this was a sort of initiation, much like that college boys indulged in. The girl's hand felt warm in his and he became conscious of a strange tingling sensation in his fingers from the contact of her hand.

Then all thoughts were swept from their minds. Hemet's friend had lifted his fingers to the pale glowing light. The finger tips traced letters across the phosphorescence. McAllis remembered suddenly where he had seen characters similar to those which were being writ upon the wall. And a great wonder grew in his breast. Surely he was seeing wrong. It couldn't be! Those hieroglyphics before his eyes were much like the ancient stone writings which some scientists believed pre-dated the Rosetta Stone.

The stranger finished his tracings. His voice suddenly boomed out in a wild chanting sound, a sound echoed by Hemet. Instinctively, the three whites drew together.

A vast surge of sound swept down upon them. As from the very walls and roof it came. It was like the roaring of a thousand Niagras. Their very thoughts were drowned in the vastness of it—it was a physical thing, too. For they felt themselves drawn upward and outward, as if they were borne on some unseen maelstrom. Litmer clung tightly to the girl's hand. Tighter and tighter. And felt her grip loosen. Desperately he clutched at the slim fingers with all his strength. The roaring grew louder, more unbearable. He felt his throat muscles contract in a scream, felt a something arise from within. Then all was blotted from his consciousness!

SHEILA felt as if she was air-borne. She smiled to herself at the strange thought.

"That's silly," her thoughts ran.

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"How did I get into a plane? Why I was in Chowrath Sam's with those two nice men. I wonder what became of them? I mean I wonder what became of Ralph?"

Suddenly she was filled with an overpowering sense of fear. It was so dark. And she was all alone in this darkness. There was no one else in all this vast place of eternal gloom. *They* had sent her here to die! Her mouth opened and she screamed.

A voice answered her scream.

"Easy, kid," the voice said.

Then she opened her eyes.

That face above her. It looked so familiar. The wide, intelligent forehead, the clipped, blond hair, with the one unruly lock that always found it a struggle to remain in place, the wide-set eyes, now looking into hers, a troubled look in their blue depths. Her own eyes went wide as full consciousness returned to her. It was Ralph who was looking down at her.

He sighed in relief as sanity returned to her eyes. Gently he lifted her to her feet and, when she was erect, put his arm around her in support. McAllis, his small body bent in a half crouch, eyes crinkled in concentration, head forward, was a tense figure as he watched the two men who stood before him.

How it had happened was a vast mystery to him. One second they had been in a tunnel, dark and mysterious, the next second—or was it the next year; he didn't know, nor was there a way of telling—they were in this strange land.

They were on the edge of a vast plain. Behind them stretched the immensity of a forest whose trees were so close set no light showed between the trunks. To the right a wide river flowed in even tenor, to lose itself in the blue haze beyond the farthest sweep of the plain. All this was mysterious enough. The greater mystery, however, was what lay before them.

There before their eyes lay the stretches of a large and ancient city. That it was ancient, McAllis had no doubt. For a second, he thought it was a Biblical town come to life so like an illustration from the Bible was it. Hemet and his friend, a little in advance of the others were also facing the town. They turned and came back to the puzzled three.

"Mu Minor," Hemet announced, his hand making a sweeping gesture toward the town.

"What do you mean, Mu Minor?" Litmer asked aggressively.

"My home," the black said simply.

"What happened? Where are we?" Sheila asked. There was something akin to panic in her voice. Litmer's arms tightened about her.

It was Hemet's friend who answered the question. There was a reassuring tone to his voice and somehow they felt more at ease with his words, yet he said nothing that enlightened them in any way.

"This is Mu Minor, the second city in the land of Mu. It is our home to which Hemet, as temporal ruler, has been recalled."

McALLIS' eyes had been looking all around as the other was speaking. He had seen things which made him think he was losing his senses. They were in some sort of earthen shell, so immense he could not distinguish the boundaries. Nor was there any mistaking it. He was afraid to think, to attempt to reason out the phenomenon of their transition.

"My people await me," Hemet said as he turned and began to walk with long strides toward the city.

The three whites followed with an almost helpless resignation. It was as if

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they were in the hands of an inexorable fate. Whatever bridges they had crossed seemed to lay, burned, far behind them, in some past to which they were now lost.

McAllis, his bandy legs hard put to follow the longer ones of the two in advance, skipped to their side. His bright glance was quick to see the look of worry come to life on the brow of Hemet's friend. Something was wrong! Suddenly Hemet's companion laid his hand on Hemet's in a restraining gesture.

"Hold," he said.

Hemet turned to him, puzzlement large in his eyes.

"Why?" he asked.

Litmer and the girl came up too.

"Look!" the other commanded.

They all looked to where the outstretched hand was pointing.

"Fire!" Hemet exclaimed.

"Aye! At the west wall," the other said.

They all saw now what he had seen. Oily thread of smoke curled upward from that part of the city beyond their vision. Suddenly the smoke thickened and flames became visible.

With that Hemet broke into a run. They followed the racing figure. There was nothing else to do. Whatever they had fallen into, Hemet and his friend held the key to it. Sheila, doing her best to keep close to the two in advance, was helped by Litmer, who kept his pace close to hers. McAllis panted and gasped as the yards swept by. Then, sooner than they had thought possible, they were within the shadows of the near walls and hearing the sounds which came from within.

Some sort of battle was taking place. The sound of men shouting, the clash of arms, the scream of the wounded, all made it too plain that their entry was not to be a peaceful one.

Hemet and his friend ran along the wall for perhaps a hundred yards. Then they were within the shadows of a pair of huge bronze gates. The gates were open. Hemet didn't hesitate. His body pivoted sharply and he ran past them. They followed.

Up twisting, narrow streets, past stone houses whose strange architecture was only something to be glimpsed in passing, all seemingly deserted, and at last into a sort of central plaza. Here an immense stone structure reached toward the sky in a magnificent sweep of beauty. Whatever was happening, was taking place just beyond the structure.

FOR the first time Hemet showed indecision. He stopped his headlong pace. His eyes were narrowed in thought and his even teeth held his lips in thrall as he twisted his head about, as though he were searching for something.

"What's wrong ?" McAllis gurgled in strangled gasps.

Sheila and Litmer could only stand together, wordlessly and watch and wait for developments.

"We are being attacked," Hemet explained needlessly. "They heard of my exile's end and are taking advantage of it."

"Who the hell are they?" McAllis demanded stridently. The second's pause had returned the power to his voice.

"Maor!"

"Yes," said the other.

"Watch over these. Keep them out of danger. The forces of Mu are not within the walls, yet. I'll try to find the commander of the palace guard," Hemet spoke in short, jerky sentences. He had not forgotten them. But it was also evident they were only in the background of his mind.

They watched his tall, beautifully

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muscled figure until it disappeared across the far side of the plaza. Then they turned to Maor and waited for what he had in mind for them.

It was really the first time they had a chance to see what sort of man he was. Tall, almost as tall as Hemet, he was thicker of figure, older in appearance. His face, as dark as Hemet's showed lines of age and the broad, high forehead was wrinkled as if he thought a great deal on things. Everything about him gave visible proof that here was a man of intelligence.

At the moment he was watching the smoke and flames, now clearly to be seen, heard and smelled. Strangely, the sounds of battle they had heard before they reached the plaza were now diminished to a faintness barely discernible, as if the tides of war had swept beyond the distant walls.

At last Maor turned and gave to each a long, grave, searching look.

"Hemet has told me that one of you saved his life. For that the people of Mu Minor will always be grateful. This is not the place or time for explanations. Save them. I can only say that all will be well with you. Now, follow me."

They noticed, as they followed, that the street which they crossed, unlike the others they had come across, was paved, and with close-fitting, well-mortised blocks of stone. There was a collective gasp from the three whites as they came close enough to see the building's beauty.

"What do you call it?" Sheila asked, forgetting for the moment her worry and fear.

"'The House of the Thousand Pillars,'" Maor replied proudly. "Each pillar represents a decade that Mu had known in the upper world. You won't see the inner temple, though, until Hemet returns."

"It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," Sheila said softly.

McAllis was the only realist among them at that moment. Maor's words had set a train of thoughts into action.

"Mu?" he asked. "What are you talking about? I thought that was a tale told by those who can make no better explanation for the discovery of certain remains, than to invent a land and name it Mu."

"I said that all these questions will be answered later," Maor said, smiling.

McAllis put his freckled, pale-skinned hand on the black one next to him. "Just one answer," he said. "Tell me, was there a transition in time? Are we . . . ?"

Maor held up his free hand. "I don't know," he said. "Hemet was the first man to be exiled. Therefore I can't say yes or no. This I can say, time is relative." He shrugged his shoulders and and continued, "Perhaps we are still in the tunnel, frozen into immobility."

HE GENTLY released himself from McAllis' grip and continued on into the gate before them. It was one of several, set between the slender, spirals of marble, whose rounded sides bore the most remarkable tracings they had ever seen. Of course Maor's answer hadn't satisfied McAllis. If there was a battle raging, for whatever reason, why then shouldn't they worry? Suppose the forces of Hemet, or whoever was in command lost? McAllis hurried after the three ahead, his mind busy in useless and frantic conjecture.

Maor too, was lost in thought. He wondered what had happened in the interim between his departure and arrival. Tala-On had died. There was only one thing to do then, the ancients had decided. Recall Hemet from the exile imposed on him by Tala-On. Things had been coming to a head. What with the desire of the people of Mu Minor to

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separate themselves from the sister city of Mu Major and from the terrorist rule of the older city.

Maor knew that this was not a full-fledged invasion. They were only attacking from the river's side. That meant only the fleet or part of it was employed. Certainly, on reflection, only part of it. For if all the ships had taken part then the whole city would have been surrounded. Maor thought he had the answer. They had heard of Hemet's recall and had sent out a reconnoitering force to test the strength and loyalty of the inhabitants. Well, they knew now. The more he thought of it, the surer he was he had the answer.

He became conscious of the footsteps of the strangers from above. Hemet and his avowal of a debt sometimes brought him trouble. Like now. How were they to explain these to the council of elders? Well, that was Hemet's affair.

He wondered whether or not to bring these people to the council now or wait until Hemet returned. Perhaps it would be better if he waited? With that, he turned from the corridor which would have led to the inner chamber and took them directly to the room prepared for Hemet's return. . . .

AN IRRELEVANT thought came to Litmer when they entered Hemet's palatial quarters. That the scene he saw was like something out of a De Mille picture. He had never imagined that there could be such a room, other than in the mind of a movie producer.

Maor said, "Hemet likes simplicity. I will go and prepare room for all of you . . rooms perhaps more to your taste." But McAllis noticed that Maor was smiling as he spoke and the smile spoke louder than words of the pride he felt in the room.

Even Sheila, whose tastes were, despite the wealth she knew, of a rather simple nature, looked with awe at the furnishings of the room. She had known the flamboyant tastes of the Hindu princes'. But this was something beyond even their scope.

The walls, from ceiling to floor, were paneled in the most beautiful woods they had ever seen. On close inspection they saw that no two of the panels were alike in either color or grain. And every color of the rainbow was represented. Yet there was no clash. The great dome of the ceiling was a mass of varicolored marble. A cool, golden light streamed in from some hidden source and spread in restful emanation about the room. A dozen couches, looking like some of the modern designs of the world they knew, were placed in various corners.

Litmer, who was a realist at heart, turned to the others and said:

"Well, might as well make ourselves comfortable. Because it looks like we're going to be here for quite a spell."

Maor's voice was gentle as he said: "That's a good frame of mind. And however long your stay, it will be pleasant. And now, if you will excuse me, I must go and make my report to the elders."

They watched him leave with mixed feelings. But only the girl showed hers. She burst into sudden tears.

Instantly Litmer and McAllis tried to comfort her. But they only made matters worse. For they did not know she was crying not from fear but from the reaction of the terrifying experience she had been through. In a moment her tears dried. Gently she released herself from Litmer's arms.

"I'm all right," she said. "Just a lapse into being a woman. I was only thinking of my father. Even though he doesn't seem to think much of me."

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McAllis seized on her remark. He realized that if he got her mind off their predicament, perhaps she wouldn't dwell too much on it.

He said, "What do you mean?"

She smiled at him, as if she divined the reason behind the question. "I'd better not go into that. Besides I don't think it's going to make much difference what I think of him, now. I'd rather talk about us, here."

A sensible girl, McAllis thought. And deserving of a proper answer.

"I'm afraid there isn't anything we can say about that. The whole thing is a mystery to me. And I have no explanation for it. Still, there must be one. We can only wait for Hemet's return."

LITMER had taken Sheila to one of the couches with him. They listened to McAllis and shook their heads at what he said.

"Look, McAllis," Litmer said. "We're not blind. We're somewhere in the—if you'll excuse the expression—bowels of the earth. How we got here, I can't explain. But I don't think that any of us have any doubts on that point. As for me, all I want is out. And when Maor or Hemet comes back, I'm telling him that."

Maor came back sooner than he imagined he would. They took one look at his face and realized something was wrong. Litmer leaped from the couch where he had been talking to Sheila in low tones and confronted the black.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"The—the elders want to—to see you," Maor stuttered.

"That's fine," Litmer said. "Because I want to see them."

McAllis gave Litmer a sharp look and seeing the storm signals in the other's eyes, hastily interjected a note of warning.

"Easy, now, lad. Let's not be too hasty about what we say. Better let me do the talking, eh?"

Sheila, too, saw that Litmer was angry. "I think Mr. McAllis is right, Ralph."

McAllis turned to Maor and asked. "What happened? You look like the end of the world's come to us."

Whatever had been said to Maor had hit him hard, for he was sweating and jumpy. He bit his lips and answered, "Hemet! He had no right to bring you with him. The elders were very angry with us. And they want to see you."

He would say no more. Instead, he turned abruptly on his heel and strode from the room. They followed him down the length of a long corridor until it ended at a blank wall. He turned left for a few feet and stopped at a closed door.

"Whatever you do, don't antagonize them," he begged.

"We won't," McAllis assured him.

Maor nodded gravely at the words and opened the door. Holding it open with one hand, he motioned to them to enter with his free one.

Twelve men were seated around a table. They were dressed in identical robes of powder blue, trimmed in a red border. A circlet of gold was around each forehead. Their faces were turned in the direction of the four who entered the room. Maor closed the door and stood as though on watch before it. Then one of the twelve stood up.

He was a tall man, slender and young. In fact they noticed that the elders were all young. When he spoke his voice was resonant with power and vigor:

"These are the three?"

"Yes, Elder," Maor replied respectfully.

"Let them step forward, then," the elder said.

Before Litmer could say what he

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wanted to, McAllis did as the other ordered. Litmer and the girl followed.

"We have been told," the elder began without p r e a m b l e, "that our ruler brought you here."

McAllis nodded.

"It is not well," the elder continued. "No stranger has set foot in Mu Minor in thousands of years. At least no stranger from the regions above. It is not well," he repeated.

There was a grave nodding of heads from the circle of men about the table.

"Although we have no doubt that there was a good and sufficient reason for Hemet's having done what he did, still the council should have been consulted."

McALLIS was getting tired of this, "it is not well," business. For that matter, it wasn't well with them either. They hadn't been asked whether they had wanted to come. He knew, though, that tact was the better part of valor in this case. And so he said quite simply as if it was the only way to settle the matter to the satisfaction of all, "We agree that Hemet had a good reason. But since you don't think so, and since it is evident that we are not wanted, then perhaps it were better that we were sent back."

A small smile appeared at the corner of the young-elder's mouth.

"Well spoken," he said softly. "If that were only possible. But it isn't."

Something told McAllis that there was no good for them in the other's words.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"We regret that circumstances compel us to do what we must. And that in spite of the fact that you are under Hemet's protection. But since he did not consult us, he too must accept the consequences."

"Just a minute!" Litmer broke in. "As my friend said, we didn't ask to come here. I don't know what rigmarole you're going through, but all we want is to get back where we came from. I for one, can't see what's so difficult about that."

"That is because you can't see. The traditions and customs of this country cannot be transgressed without penalty. Nor can ignorance be a proper plea. I can only abide by the decision reached by the council. And that decision is—*death!*"

"Am I included in that?" a voice asked.

They turned to the door. Hemet stood framed in its arch. But it was a Hemet different from that one whom they'd last seen. Now he wore a breastplate of gleaming armor. On his head was a helmet which fit like a toupee, so close did it set. And in his hand was a long sword, the point of which rested on the floor.

There was an instant's startled silence. Then the man at the end of the table said:

"The decision of the council is final. It will not be set aside."

"It was not always so," Hemet said, smiling.

"There w e r e circumstances, then . . ."

"And now, also," Hemet's voice rose suddenly. "I have learned that there are ways above which are not as evil as we have been taught."

"Lies! All lies! There is no good in that which is above. So our forebears said and so we hold. We exiled you once, Hemet. And can do so again."

THE MAN with the sword did not answer for a second. Instead, he strode up to the table and slammed the blade's length down on the wood. They jumped at the ringing sound it produced.

"Not while I hold this," Hemet said

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softly. "As for what our ancestors held to be true, I say that t i m e s have changed. They also said that the only God is reason. Now we have twelve Gods. The Council of Elders. Look at you. Puling youths, whose only muscles lie around your skulls. The ancients said to kill the men in the council when they reached the age of twenty-five, so that they may never become old enough to have any other opinions than those which were given to them in their childhood.

"Yes. I say that it is time your opinions were changed. And if not by one means, then by another. This sword can be the other."

"Hemet!" one of the council exclaimed. "You speak treason!"

Hemet paid no attention. His eyes held those of the man at the other end.

"Romer," he continued. "I came back in time to join the defenders of the west wall. The wicked woman of Mu had set her minions on us. What was the council doing? How was it that she was given the chance to attack?"

For the first time the other's eyes shifted. And when Hemet's eagle look swept around the table there was none who would meet his gaze.

Finally the one who had interrupted Hemet said:

"We are to blame in that. When Jason the Tyrant died there was a period of confusion. Yes, even in the council. News of his death must have come to the wicked woman who set about her plans. In the meantime we decided to recall you from your exile. We did not know . . ."

Hemet laughed aloud. Turning to the three who had come with him, he said:

"You hear. They did not know! These men, who are the wisest in all Mu, did not know. They confess to ignorance. Yet they can complacently sentence a man to death or exile without hearing him. For they have precedent, the precedent of thousands of years of custom. Well, I say it is time all that is changed. I say it because there are circumstances which d e m a n d they be changed. There is a woman in another land who has already changed them. And her change is evil. We must stop her. Even at the cost of abolishing the council—unless it see things our way."

A confusion of sound a r o s e at Hemet's words. To McAllis it was like the babble of children balked at play. And like a child's argument, is was broken up by the only one who showed real authority, Hemet.

"Stop that!"

There was an instant silence.

They turned to look at the man who had turned the clock's face upon them, in a wondering silence. There were some whose faces were s u d d e n l y blanched. Others grimaced in anger. But there were one or two who looked at Hemet with new-born respect. One of these, a thin-faced youth, whose slant-eyes and high cheek bones gave him the look of an Oriental, said:

"Perhaps you are right. Certainly I have thought that our methods smacked of tyranny. And I have never understood the anachronism of our operations. We hold and empty authority. Jason proved that. For the army was with him. Then how valid can our decisions be? Hemet, I am with you. What is it that you want?"

"First," Hemet said, "I want you all to be with me. We cannot have a divided house."

ONCE more there was silence. This time it was a silence in which men gazed at each other measuringly. No word was spoken. But when Romer said, "Speak on," there was no dissenting voice.

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"We are Mu the lesser," Hemet said, speaking slowly and carefully, as if each word was measured. "Always we have been the pawn in the other's game. Why? Because of a superstition handed down uncounted thousands of years ago. That when the pool gives up its sword, then Mu will conquer. I say there is no sword. And I am willing to go to the pool and search for it."

"But Hemet," Romer said, "It can only be given to the high priestess of Mu. And she has it already."

"Who says this?"

No one answered.

"You see," Hemet said, "always hearsay. Don't you see? If she had it, we would have been conquered long ago. And another thing. This constant bickering as to who is the superior race, theirs or ours. I say we should be at peace. If I find the sword . . . but I know I won't."

"Just one thing, Hemet," the thin-faced one said. "How are you, with your dark skin, to go about getting to the pool?"

"Through these," Hemet said pointing to Litmer and McAllis.

The man who asked the question grinned suddenly. And in a second the others grinned also. The three whites looked at each other in wonder. They weren't kept waiting long.

"We need your help," Hemet said. "And in return, you will be given your freedom."

"I still don't get it," Litmer said. "Freedom to what? These guys said that there is no way out of here. So what freedom are you talking about?"

"I'll tell you later."

"Now!" It was McAllis whose voice was a clarion call.

"Very well. There is a way. But these holier-than-thous hold the secret. If you help, then they'll give the secret up."

There were twelve confirming nods.

"Okay," Litmer said. "Let's go."

THEY went back to Hemet's room. Hemet seated them on one of the huge overstuffed sofas and began a slow, thoughtful parade around the room. As he walked back and forth before them, he began to talk.

"If it hadn't been for the fire, all of you would be back in that restaurant in Bombay. But because of it you are here. I, of course, could not have done other than I did, even though I realized the consequences of my act. For Litmer saved my life. And he did not think before he acted.

"But that is done. You are now in a strange environment: you are in a strange land, an unbelievable land, where there is no night where time will seem endless, where strange and at times frightful things will come to pass. I am telling you all this as a sort of warning, so that when these things transpire you will at least know and be forewarned.

"Certain things have come to a head. I cannot go into detailed history of these things for several reasons. But I think you got an idea that whatever it is, is of the utmost importance. From now on, all of you will place yourselves under my lead and do as I command and do it with unswerving obedience."

He waited until the import of his words sank in, and when he saw that they agreed, he continued:

"There are two races in the land of Mu. That has always been the focal point of all arguments. Because we in Lesser Mu are of the dark race we have been looked down on by the people of Greater Mu. There is no reason for it, I tell you. He stopped his somewhat impassioned talk and grinned down at them. "There I go again," he said. "It's the reformer in me. Whenever I get into the *why* of my people's plight, I get

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all heated up. At any rate, all our troubles hinge on an old folk tale. When the flood came, as was foretold, and the Great Migration took place to this land, we found it inhabited by the great anthropoids.

"In upper Mu there had been the Sacred Pool from which all the prophecies of the elders bore fruit. Here too there was found a pool. The location of it was known to the elders of each tribe. And as luck, or whatever you want to call it happened, the elders of Greater Mu discovered it first. At least that's the way the story goes. And having discovered it, they claimed it as their personal property. But because it was in the land of the anthropoids and because we had to combine forces to kill them, we found it too. The hitch to that being that they said what we found was not the real pool but one similar to it.

"Now they say that a new prophecy is in order. The sacred pool gave up its sword to the high priestess."

"Wait a minute!" Litmer said in perplexity. "What is this prophecy with which you are so concerned?"

"Simply, it's this. That whoever receives the sword will hold the power. The sword is a symbol of death. And they claim the death will be ours."

TO McALLIS all this talk by Hemet was so much fairy tale. He thought he detected a note of derisive disbelief in the black's manner. Then again, he didn't know when reality began and fable ended. From what he heard in the council chamber, he gathered that Hemet didn't believe in the prophecy, and that he was setting out to disprove it. Now he was saying otherwise.

"Well," McAllis said. "Since you have a location that the others claim is false, how are you going to go about proving that it isn't so?"

"By finding out where their pool is," Hemet said.

"What's so hard about that?" McAllis asked.

"Their pool is supposed to lie beyond the borders of Greater Mu," Hemet said.

McAllis saw the difficulty of that.

Then Hemet told how he was going to circumvent that difficulty. The very daring of Hemet's maneuver took their breath away. Simply put. Hemet proposed to teach the three, Sheila wanted to be in on whatever was to happen, the manners and customs and whatever knowledge was neccesary to their plan. What was more, Hemet said could be done quite easily.

"How?" Litmer asked.

"Come. I'll sow you," Hemet said.

He took them to an annex in the rear of the temple. It was an amazing room. To McAllis, who had always been interested in the bizzare, there were things there he had always assumed were only in the minds of those who wrote inventive tales.

Hemet seated McAllis in a chair much like that known as the electric chair, and from which wires ran to concealed outlets. Hemet fitted a strange contraption to McAllis' head. While he set the helmet in place, he told them something of what he proposed doing.

"The ancients of Mu were wise and learned in the sciences of which, today, we can only participate in because we have the rituals, as it were. But we no longer possess the why of what we do. For example, this machine. All we know is that whatever the sitter hears impinges on his memory and is never forgotten. So that when I read to McAllis what I'm going to, he'll never forget."

With that, Hemet turned a switch at the side of the chair. A low humming sound filled the room. The wires attached to the helmet glowed red for a

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second, then subsided. McAllis *felt* a strange stirring in his mind. Images of things and places of which he had no recollection ran through his mind, then all faded and he lost consciousness.

In the meantime Hemet continued with his talk. McAllis' eyes were closed. They saw that he was unconscious Yet there was no sign of pain or discomfort. It was as if he was asleep.

HEMET had drawn a table in which were several drawers which proved to contain various small books. When McAllis was completely under the influence of the rays which the machine emanated, Hemet began to read from one of the booklets. To their surprise it proved to be a condensed history of Mu. The reading took no more than a half hour. Once more Hemet's fingers dipped into a drawer. This time they came up with what looked like a folder of small photographs. They weren't photographs, but they were pictures. Hemet adjusted an arm, much like that dentists use to hold their drills, over McAllis' head. There was a slit in the arm. Into the slit, Hemet placed the folder. Then he adjusted the arm until it stood directly in front of McAllis' eyes. Slowly, Hemet drew the folder out of the slot.

"Although his eyes are closed, these pictures, like the words I read, will be retained," Hemet said.

When the folder's last section had passed through the slot, Hemet lifted the arm out, snapped the switch and waited for McAllis to open his eyes.

"How do you feel?" Litmer asked, curiously.

McAllis shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't say I feel any different than before," McAllis answered.

"Now you," Hemet said to Litmer.

It was a repeat performance. When Sheila had gone through what the other two had, Hemet took them back to his room.

"We will leave soon," he said when they were comfortable once more.

They looked at him questioningly. He gave them an answer.

"Now that you have become acquainted with necessary details, what sense is there in wasting time? The sooner we get this done the sooner you'll know freedom. I imagine that is the big thought in your minds."

Sheila said, "You're q u i t e right, Hemet. At least I can say that."

"And I echo her sentiments," Litmer said.

"Then I will return as speedily as possible," Hemet said.

THEY watched his departure with mixed feelings. Oddly enough, despite the extreme strangeness of what had befallen them, none gave thought to what might be the outcome of their journey into the unknown.

McAllis gave voice to his thoughts. And Litmer noticed that the Scotsman, usually rational in his approach to a problem, seemed at a loss in this one.

"When one has been at sea the years I have, one gets to know from experience, many strange things. Certainly what I have gone through today or tonight or whatever the time is, is the most unique of all my experiences.

"Think of it! To discover that not only did such a land as Mu exist long ago, it exists today. We are part of it. And through the science of that land, we have gone through something so incredible that were we to tell it when we come back there won't be one who will believe. By all that's holy! I tell you that I *know* everything there is to know about this land. And how? Through a machine's direction. Just as you know. Nor can you tell me you don't!"

They did not deny it.

"McAllis, you amaze me," Litmer

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said. He turned to Sheila and continued, "I got to know this little guy pretty well, on ship. As a matter of fact, he was the only human on board, the rest either animals in the dress of men, or well, I guess it'd be hard to explain; you'd have to see them. But I soon saw that McAllis was different from the rest.

"He's a cute little guy, Sheila. Down in the engine room, where he was king, he'd talk in a broad Scotch dialect, rolling his r's like a vaudeville comic. Then we'd get on deck and the philosopher in him would come out and he was the Oxford don."

". . . Cambridge, lad."

"What's the difference? It wasn't Billingsgate, that I knew. We'd talk of cabbages and kings and what makes both. Mac has some pretty strong ideas on the rights of man."

"Yes," Sheila said, reflectively. "I remember."

McAllis reddened. He knew what she meant. His chin started to come up, then he saw the gentle smile on her lips and he relaxed. Whatever her birthright, she had abandoned it.

Litmer went on, "I might as well confess. I've just been following Mac's lead in this. When Hemet brought us to that weird room and told us about that machine and what it was going to do, I was going to rebel. But when Mac just walked up and sat himself into it, calm as you please, I thought, what the hell! He's figured out the angles and if it's passed with him, it's all right with me."

It was high praise, indeed. The redness of embarrassment extended down into the wrinkles of McAllis' throat. Litmer had so much as said that Mac was to be their leader. Now Sheila voiced he thoughts.

"Neither of you have said anything about me. That's nice of you. I know that I've been pretty much in your minds, since we've been down here."

It was Litmer's turn to blush. He stammered, "Aw now, Sheila. You didn't think we'd—"

Her fingers closed around his arm in a strong caress.

"To say that I haven't been worried, would be silly. But something very peculiar has happened to my way of thinking since we've been here. I can't place my finger on what it is or why I should feel the way I do; nevertheless, I feel as if this was home."

SHE laughed lightly, as if what she had said was a joke to be enjoyed by all. Then she looked into McAllis' very sober face and her gaiety dampened. Almost with an air of "be damned to you," she continued, "I can't help it. That's the way I feel."

"Good," McAllis said tersely. "I admit I've been afraid for you. Now I'm not. Because whatever happens we are more or less prepared to pay the consequences."

"How do you mean?" Litmer asked.

"Think!" McAllis commanded. "We all know what sort of people they are whom we're going to buck. You know their background. Why man! We're bearding the lion in his den. And this lion has more than teeth and claws. I don't want to think of what will be our fate should we be captured."

They knew what he meant. They saw the same scenes; the scenes shown them by the strange contraption they had sat in. The people of Greater Mu knew nothing of pity. Nor of justice.

Sheila repressed a shudder. Her chin came up and her eyes flashed. "All my life I've wished for a chance to fight for the under dog. This is it, as far as I'm concerned."

"Thank you, Miss Sheila," Hemet said.

They had been so engrossed in their talk, they had not heard his entrance.

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Nor did they know how much of what they had said had been heard. From the looks of him, though, they knew that he approved of whatever he had heard, for his lips were parted in a broad smile.

"Not at all," the girl said. "What's all that?" she asked pointing to the pieces of armor in his hands.

The armor you'll have to wear. I hope this suit fits you, Miss Sheila," he said apologetically, handing her several pieces. "They're really a boy's fit. But perhaps they'll do."

McAllis and Litmer looked at each other and turned to Hemet. He answered their questions before they had a chance to voice them. "Come with me. We'll dress in Maor's room."

"Give me ten minutes," Sheila said, as they were leaving.

"Is Maor going along?" McAllis asked on the way to Maor's room.

"But of course," Hemet replied. And Stomat also."

"Who's he?" Litmer asked.

"That thin-faced elder who leaped to my defense."

"I like him," McAllis said.

"He has courage. And intelligence, too," Hemet said. "That counts more, in what we're attempting, than any amount of courage."

Maor and Stomat were already dressed in their armor when the three entered. Not much was said while McAllis and Litmer tried on the almost skin tight breast plates and leg pieces. They were amazed when they discovered that there was a zipper arrangement in the back of the breastplate. When they zipped it down, they found the armor fit snuggly, yet did not restrict their movements.

Litmer strutted around the room after he was completely dressed and asked McAllis, "How do I look?"

"Like a Greek god," McAllis said admiringly. He looked ruefully down at his own rather bowed legs, hairy and knobbed. At his gesture they all roared in good-natured laughter.

"No, Mac, you don't look like an illustration from Health magazine. But looks don't count here."

A thought struck McAllis at the words.

"So they don't. Which reminds me. Our weapons . . ." He left the words hanging, like a rope which he wanted someone to grab hold of.

Stomat answered, "Swords for you and your friend. We will have bows and arrows. And don't worry about whether you will know how to use your weapons. When the time comes, and I hope it doesn't, you will find that their use will be natural to you."

THERE came a knock at the door just then and, at Maor's command to enter, three women walked in. They carried trays of food on their shoulders. McAllis and Litmer realized then, that they hadn't eaten since they left ship. The fire had broken out before they had their food brought to them at Chowrath Sam's.

Litmer was interested in the food. But McAllis found it secondary in interest to the women. They were the first he had seen in this strange land.

They were dressed in a sort of shift which hung almost to the floor. It was cut low at the neck and square so that their bosoms were partly exposed. The rounded breasts and full hips, the easy manner of their walk made a great impression on McAllis. He had never seen women so beautifully shaped or so unaware of their charms. Their skin was dark although not so dark as the men's. Altogether, they were the most handsome women he had ever seen.

They brought the food directly to the men and waited while the men ate from

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the plates. When they had done, the women walked out, all this without their having said a single word.

"Our women are well-trained," Hemet said proudly.

"I see," McAllis said. "The suffrage movement has not reached Mu, has it?"

The Murians looked blankly at him. His words had not had any meaning for them.

"Skip it," Litmer said. He had known what McAllis meant and had also seen that the others had no knowledge of the suffrage movement.

"I imagine Miss Sheila is ready," Hemet said, coming back to their immediate concern.

She was. Litmer gave voice to an exuberant, "Yeow!" when he saw how the armor fit. It was as if she had been poured into the garment. Her skin was as white as the proverbial snow. Hemet had also frought a piece of armor for her which they did not have. This piece covered her from her waist to her knees. Here the leg pieces came. In effect, she was covered from chest to ankles by the close-fitting armor.

The armor they wore extended from the chest to the hips and had an apron-like breech-clout. Then they had the leg pieces. And of course the helmets.

"I think I'll call you Diana," Litmer said.

"Very well, Apollo," she said.

"And what will I be called? Vulcan?" McAllis said. He smiled broadly at his own witticism. And although the Murians did not know to whom they were referring, they joined the laughter at McAllis' expense.

It was Stomat who interjected the serious note.

"Well, now that we are ready, let us not delay."

IT LOOKED like a cabin cruiser, a little more streamlined than any model they had ever seen, but recognizable. When they made themselves comfortable, Maor threw a switch and the boat glided away from the pier. McAllis' face lit with interest and wonder. He recognized that this boat embodied designs so far advanced from anything the world he knew, that they outmoded even the most modern battlewagons.

For one thing, the complete silence of the motor's performance. And another, the speed of the boat. It seemed to barely touch the water. It was almost as if the boat was in flight.

"McAllis!" a voice called to him from the depths below.

It was Litmer. He, Sheila, Stomat and Hemet had gone below, leaving Maor who was to be the pilot, above with McAllis.

McAllis trotted down the short flight of steps to the interior. Here the rest were seated on an elliptical settee, cushioned in red. The walls were of some transparent material and McAllis saw that a full view of the outside was to be had. There was another small door at the stern. Hemet's head emerged from the opening of this door. He motioned McAllis to come forward.

"You are an engineer," Hemet said, when McAllis joined him. "I want you to see this."

McAllis looked down to what Hemet was pointing at and saw the tiniest engine he had ever seen. It could have been contained in a quart milk bottle with space left over.

McAllis' eyebrows lifted in amazement.

"*That*—is the engine?"

"Yes," Hemet answered with a smile.

McAllis backed out and joined the rest on the settee. There was a puzzled crease to his forehead. He waited until Hemet joined them, then said:

"Enlighten me. I don't understand the anachronisms of this land. Here

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we are, dressed in armor, having for weapons the most primitive kind, and riding in a craft which is far in advance of anything I've ever known. Further, back there in the Hall of Science you people had a machine whose use was so incredible it taxed my imagination. Explain, please, before I lose my mind."

It was Stomat who answered his question.

"What I am going to say will probably confuse you even more. In the first place our ancestors came from a planet which lies in a universe far beyond anything you can imagine. When the first of them came, they brought with them only those mechanical achievements which would do good. So that the weapons of war which they knew, far more terrible and destructive than a mind can conceive, were left behind. They came to colonize the new world they had discovered, not to destroy it.

"But through some unforeseen error, they miscalculated the time of their arrival. Within a few thousands of years an upheaval of nature made necessary the great migration."

Great migration? Back to that unknown planet? McAllis was stunned by what he heard.

"There was another planet, not too far distant, which had been a second choice, if this one proved not too suitable. The greatest part of the colonists went to that planet. But there were some who elected to remain. When Lemuria sank beneath the ocean, there were carried beneath the waves, a hundred craft which had been especially built for just such an emergency. And in that craft which brought our ancestors there were also those machines and implements for our survival.

"It will take too long to relate what took place when they came here. Although the machine gave you the images of a great part of our life, it was adjusted so that some of it remained a mystery. Now as to the primitive state of the weapons we have. War was something we did not think of. As for subduing the natives of Lower Mu as we call this, we used certain rays. Then those rays and their machinery were destroyed."

McAllis nodded his head weakly. These people loved to talk. Well, he couldn't blame them.

"I think I'll go above," he said.

"We're coming, too," Sheila said. "After all, if we're going to be here, we might as well act like tourists."

TO LITMER, the wide river, curving through lush banks of tropical growth reminded him of the Amazon. The screech of birds was plainly to be heard. Now and then flights of them, disturbed by the strange craft, would rise and fly off. They were much like the pelicans of Florida. Sheila was entranced by it all. Purring sounds of excitement came from her throat. Only McAllis looked for those things not of nature.

So it was that only he among his friends of the upper world, saw the narrow strip of land project itself into the river. The boat took the left turning nor did they notice. There was nothing different to be seen. The vegetation and sounds were the same.

McAllis, always curious, asked, "The other turning . . . what did it lead to?"

"Danger," Maor answered in the same low voice McAllis used.

"And this doesn't, I suppose," McAllis said, somewhat ironically.

"Of a different kind. There would be no escape from the other."

The light broke on McAllis. "Of course," he said. "Theti, the High Priestess."

Maor glanced at the small man at

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his side and laughed softly.

"You see," he said. "Already you know. There will be no need to ask questions. I mean of us. Simply ask yourself. The machine has done the rest."

Hemet joined them. His eyes were narrowed and his head jutted forward, like an eagle sighting prey. His nostrils were dilated, as if he were scenting the direction. Once or twice he nodded. He threw words over his shoulder at Maor, harsh words, words of warning:

"I don't like it, Maor. The apes! We should have seen them by now. Something tells me that . . ."

The boat had followed the curve of the river. With Hemet's last words, Maor had twisted the wheel viciously. McAllis caught a quick glimpse of the huge log which had come up from out of nowhere and had slid directly in front of them. If it hadn't been for Maor's quick-wittedness, they would have struck it. Sheila's voice broke off in the midst of a scream. She as well as the rest had seen the log and as the boat swung shorewise, the dozen craft which lurked beneath the spreading branches of a jungle giant.

BEFORE Maor could react, the other craft had them surrounded. But if Maor's reflexes were slow, Hemet's were as lightning. Even as he yelled, "McAllis! The wheel," his hands had reached for and taken up one of the short bows and had fitted an arrow to its string and had sent it on its way. Nor was Maor and Stomat one whit behind him.

McAllis acted from instinct. The nearest craft was only a few feet off and the rest were closing in. Instead of trying to escape, he aimed their craft at the nearest of those approaching. They avoided a collision by the barest of miracles. In the meantime a hail of arrows was loosed by Hemet and his friends.

Litmer too, had acted quickly. He had thrown the girl down against the leather of the high-backed seat which ran around the boat. Keeping her head down, he lifted his own so that his blond hair barely showed above the rim. He saw that McAllis' maneuver had made the other craft swerve from their path. It made an opening between them into which McAllis directed the boat.

A woman's voice shouted a command:

"Alive! You hear! I want them alive!"

There was a dull thud that sounded just to the right of where Litmer was peering, and the short shaft of an arrow vibrated gently in the wood. Litmer ducked quickly, just in time to escape a veritable hail of arrows. Behind him, he heard someone grunt in pain. Turning, he saw Stomat fall back weakly against the companionway stairs. His right hand clutched at his shoulder from which the bright shaft of an arrow protruded half way. Twin columns of crimson suddenly rolled down the flesh.

Once more the woman's voice came to them:

"No more! Ram their boat. I want them alive!"

Litmer raised his head again. He saw that McAllis' maneuver had swept them past the nearest of their enemies. They swung in close to shore and as McAllis found the throttle, Hemet and Maor shot bolts from their bows with incredible speed and accuracy.

"We made it!" Litmer shouted exultantly. "We made—"

There was a terrific crash; the boat lifted until the stern was higher than the bow, then the stern fell back into the water. They had struck a submerged log! In an instant water filled the boat.

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McAllis, who had been thrown against the wheel had his breath almost knocked from him by the shock. Even as the water sloshed around his ankles he recovered. Looking quickly about to see how the others had fared, he saw that fortune had smiled on them, for the moment. Hemet had struck face forward against the rail and suffered a cut on his forehead. But the rest had gotten away without damage.

Hemet shook his head to clear it, looked at the rising flood of water, turned to see how the rest made out, then seeing they were all okay, said, "Overboard, all of you. Hurry, before it's too late!"

But it was too late. The other boats were already on them. For the first time they saw the occupants clearly. They were the big, blond men of Mu Major. There were a dozen men to each craft, and all were armed with bow and arrow. Besides those each of them carried a short, broad-bladed sword in a scabbard at his belt.

But it was the woman who attracted their attention. Litmer, one arm around Sheila in protective embrace, caught sight of her just as he stepped to the rail. So striking was her appearance that he paused in the very of act of leaping overboard.

There were no commands. The men in the other craft acted with a coordination that showed long training. While some produced grappling hooks, others leaped into Hemet's boat. Those who came aboard carried their short swords at the ready.

In a moment the men who had the hooks had made their boats fast to the half-submerged one. Another instant was all it took for the transfer of Hemet and his friends, at swords point, to the boat in which the woman was in. Then the hooks were released. The boat sank in a few seconds.

THEY stood in a close group and looked their defiance at their captors. Maor, his arm clasping the half-fainting Stomat, hurriedly whispered to Hemet, "Better get that arrow out of him. He's losing blood fast. And the damned thing is barbed."

It was evidently the first time that Hemet had noticed that Stomat had been wounded. Certainly the man had not uttered a single sound, other than the first groan when the arrow struck. But now moans came from the tight-held lips.

It was the woman who gave the command what to do.

"Remove the arrow and take him to my cabin," she said.

Sheila took one look at what the two who had stepped forward to obey were doing, then looked hastily away. For while one placed both hands about the shaft and pushed hard at it, the second grasped the bloody, barbed end that came out and pulled. Stomat shrieked loudly once, then fainted.

McAllis swallowed the gorge which rose in his throat. Yet he knew that it was the only way that was possible to have gotten the arrow out. He saw the vicious barbs at the end of it. Litmer took one look then turned the cringing girl away from another glance.

"Dress his wound below," the strange woman said. "I don't want him to die."

"And why not, Thetis?" Hemet asked.

"Because I want him to die my way," she replied coldly. "As for the rest of you fools . . . but that can wait. Hota! Put them in chains." The last was said to a giant of a man who stood at her side.

Hota silently waved the waiting warriors to their task. In a moment Hemet and the rest, including the girl, were bound hand and foot. Then each of them were lifted to the backs of two

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warriors and carried below.

McAllis shifted his head so that he was able to see, while he was carried. Although the vessel of this woman they called Thetis seemed no larger than the one they had just come off of, he saw that the interior was vastly larger. More, there was another deck to it. For the warriors continued down the length of the elaborately furnished cabin and down another companionway stair.

He was the first to be carried into the sort of hold that was the goal of their porters. The two who carried him took him to the far end of the hold and dumped him to the floor. One by one the others were carried in and dumped with the same lack of ceremony. Then the warriors left without a second glance at them.

For a few seconds, silence reigned. Then Hemet's voice broke into long and sustained cursing. After which he apologised to Sheila and, in more normal tones, said:

"I should have known that there was a traitor among us."

"What do you mean?" McAllis asked.

"How else did they know we were coming?" Hemet asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," McAllis replied. "But I can't see how they could have found out about it. After all, the plan was discussed only this afternoon . . . or whatever the time of day it was."

"The time doesn't mean anything," Hemet said. "It's all relative here. While I was orienting you and the rest, the traitor had already sent out the emmisary to Thetis."

"Look!" Litmer called to them. "Would you guys mind forgetting about *how* it happened and think about the present? What are we to do about getting out of here?"

McALLIS managed to twist his body around to face Litmer. They had been bound with strips of steel, so pliable it was like rope, yet stronger than any rope could be. McAllis had tried to loosen his bonds the moment Thetis' men had left, but had stopped his efforts quickly when after straining once at his bonds. The steel bit like venom into his wrists and even with the small effort he had made, he had drawn blood.

"I'm afraid we're stuck here until this woman decides what to do with us," he said.

"Oh fine, fine!" Litmer said ironically. "Wait for that she-wolf to come! Well, not this boy. He wants out. And he's going to get out."

McAllis heard him strain at the steel cords. Then there was a muted sound of pain, and silence.

"It's no use, Ralph," Sheila said. "Better conserve your strength. There might be a chance when she frees us."

"The girl is right," Hemet said. "Thetis will not kill us immediately. I think she has other plans."

"And whatever they are, they're no good," Maor said. It was the first time he had opened his mouth other than to shout imprecations.

". . . Thetis, the high priestess?" McAllis asked.

"Yes," Hemet answered.

"How do you figure this?"

"It isn't difficult. Someone, I think Jolat the elder, managed to get word to her of what we were planning. It wasn't difficult for her to stop us since there is only one route to the pool. And since we had to use this river which lies close to the boundary of Mu Major. She merely dispatched some boats to intercept us. And did us the honor of coming, herself."

McAllis digested the information in silence. He wondered what was to happen to them. He found it very strange that he didn't seem worried about it, for

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certainly there was something to worry about. He had no doubt that the woman intended torture of some sort. Yet all he could think of was the strangeness of their situation. Here they were, plucked by some odd means, out of time and place into another time and place which existed simultaneously.

His long years at sea had given him the nature of a philosopher. The sea had acted on him like a blanket under which he retired to think his lonely thoughts. Litmer had been the only man to whom he'd unbent. He couldn't understand exactly why, unless it was that in the younger man he saw a something which he possessed in his youth. He speculated, too, on Sheila. Fate had taken a hand in her life. She had been on a walk to a restaurant. Now she lay, bound in chains, in the hull of a vessel whose very existence had been beyond her imagination. Hemet also came in for his share in McAllis' thoughts. He, like Litmer, had heard Hemet's guarded reference to the time when he would triumph. Like Litmer, McAllis had also wondered what Hemet had meant. And even now, he didn't quite get Hemet's meaning. Triumph over what? Over whom?

QUITE suddenly, McAllis became aware of movement. The single lamp which shed a feeble glow by which they were barely able to see, was swaying back and forth in its brackets. If it hadn't been for that he would not have known the boat was moving.

Hemet's head was cocked in attention. After a few minutes he relaxed with a sigh.

"Something wrong?" McAllis asked.

"I thought I heard something or someone at the door," Hemet said. "A scratching sort of noise."

They both listened. They heard nothing. McAllis relaxed once more and tried to make himself comfortable. Because they had been bound hand and foot it was difficult. He squirmed around until he found a better position. And in so doing discovered something. The steel length of chain was smooth down its length!

"Hemet!" he called excitedly.

"Yes?"

"How did they tie this? With knots?"

"What do you mean?"

"This steel or whatever it is. Are there any knots in it?"

"Roll this way," Hemet suggested, "and I'll see."

McAllis waited impatiently until Hemet examined the steel cord.

"As far as I can see," Hemet said at last, "it's a continuous piece. And the ends fit into each other by means of a slot."

"Then watch carefully . . . see what happens," McAllis said. "I'm going to pull against the steel."

He gave a long hard pull until the pain forced him to stop. Panting, he asked:

"What happened?"

"Nothing except that the ends seemed to come closer together. It seems that when you pull against it . . . wait! I think I have it. If it's true that the ends pull closer by straining against them, then they should loosen by drawing *against* them."

"I can't do it by myself," McAllis said. "I'll roll over to you. See if you can do it."

The slotted end was at their feet. The wire ran in a continuous length and was looped over their arms and thence to their ankles. McAllis inched his way across the floor until his feet were flat against Hemet's chest. There was just enough play so that Hemet could reach it with his finger tips. But he couldn't quite exert enough pressure. For when he strained to push at it, the strand

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around his own wrists pulled tighter.

McAllis solved that problem.

"Just hold the wire tightly," he said. "And I'll push as hard as I can against you."

There was a minute's intense effort. Then Hemet's voice rose in exultation. "It's loose."

McAllis stood erect, chaffed his hands to restore circulation, then set to work freeing the others.

"What now?" Litmer asked in a low voice when they had gathered as far from the doorway as possible.

"I don't know," Hemet said. "Let me think a moment."

He shook his head slowly two or three times as if discarding things which had come to his mind. Suddenly he snapped his fingers.

"I think I have it," he said in a satisfied tone. "The danger involved is great. But so is our danger anyway. This hull is made of wood. See that lamp above. It has a highly imflammable oil. And it burns in the open with a great deal of smoke. I'm going to unscrew it from its brackets and set fire to the hull . . . at the far end. I'm almost certain that there is a guard on watch just beyond that door. He'll hear our yells and if he doesn't come in himself, he'll send for help. But I'm sure that before he does so, he'll stick his head in the door to see what's happened."

THERE was no need to draw a picture to complete what else was in Hemet's mind. Maor and Litmer stationed themselves at either end of the door. The others lay down in the center of the room again and wrapped themselves in steel wire.

Then Hemet reached up, unscrewed the lamp and with a last look at his friends, hurled it into a far corner. It burst into wild flame. Hemet fell to the floor, but closer to the door than the others. Sheila began to scream, "Fire," at the top of her lungs. And after a few seconds she was no longer faking panic. Hemet had said the oil was highly inflammable. But even he was surprised at the speed with which the wood caught.

A dense smoke began to fill the confines of their prison. McAllis threw aside the wire and hastily ran with girl to the end of the hull farthest from the flames. Sheila's shouts were joined by the rest. And still no one came. It began to look as if Hemet's plan had back-fired.

The heat became unbearable. Flames licked their hungry way along walls and ceiling with incredible speed. Smoke filled the room until it became a difficult thing just to breath. It was then Litmer decided to take matters into his own hands.

Grasping the handle of the door he pulled at it. Nothing happened. Once more he jerked at it, this time with all his strength. Still nothing happened.

"Hey! We're locked in. Help me break it down."

He, Maor and Hemet stepped back a few steps, then ran hard at it hitting the door simultaneously with their shoulders. And it splintered from its hinges. Just in time, too, for the fire was already upon them. In a second they were through the elaborate and empty cabin that was Thetis'. The door to the cabin loomed emptily in front of them.

When they arrived on deck, it was night!

They stared at each other in amazement. Hemet and Maor knew where they were but McAllis, Litmer and the girl didn't. Hemet enlightened them.

"The river of the apes," he said slowly. "So that's what Thetis meant when she said we'd die her way."

"Now what?" Litmer asked. He had

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been staring about, puzzledly and had seen that they were in some subterannean place. It was either an immense cavern or an underground river. For though the gloom was intense he could make out that their were trees or bushes growing close to the river's edge.

"The she-devil put us adrift," Hemet said in explanation. "She knew we were bound for the pool. Well, this river leads to the pool, all right. Only the current will put us ashore, and bound as we were we wouldn't have had a chance against the apes."

McAllis sniffed loudly and became aware of the odor of smoke. He turned and saw the first flame shoot from the opening onto the deck. Behind it an immense cloud of oily smoke boiled forth from the depths below. It would be only a matter of minutes before the fire gutted the boat. It served one good purpose, however. They could see where they were.

"From the fire into the pot," McAllis said softly when he saw what awaited them on shore.

THERE were fully a hundred of them. They stood taller than a large man and almost as erect. And as the flames rose higher, a savage *shout* rose from the furry throats of the creatures.

"They've seen us," Hemet said savagely.

"And there isn't much we can do about it," Maor said, pointing to the flames which had practically engulfed the whole stern of the ship.

Slowly, they moved toward the bow and with each step the apes on either side of the river's narrow width raised a howl.

"What'll they do?" McAllis asked.

"Tear us to bits," Hemet said.

Suddenly there was a wild gust of flame and everyone on board was shown clearly by the bright golden light. And from a hundred throats there came a wild, exultant yell, "Moani!"

Hemet looked quickly to where the apes were pointing and saw it was at Sheila.

Once more the cry came, "Moani," this time in fear.

"Overboard, quick," Hemet shouted and suited his action to the words.

There was nothing else to do. One by one they leaped. And as they leaped, the apes followed suit. The five swam together toward the nearest shore. McAllis saw the bestial face near him, tried to turn aside but felt fingers grasp his in a grip which he could not break. He looked wildly about in search of succor but saw that the rest were in as bad a spot as he. The apes had them prisoner.

Wet and terrified, the five huddled close on shore. They could smell the animal bodies pressed close around them, smell the almost human yet distinct ape odor. Now the last of the anthropoids came ashore. The last flame flickered as the boat sank to its gunwhale, then died. A gray gloom enveloped them.

They huddled close to each other, Sheila and the rest, terrified yet brave in the face of the inevitable death. The men pressed her close in the circle, each determined to die before the first ape should touch her.

IN THE meantime the apes moved closer to the humans until finally they were in a great circle around the smaller one. Then it was that the largest of them stepped forward. He looked so much like a great, furry man that McAllis thought it natural for him to make the human sounds he did:

"Moani. You come back."

He shook his head in disbelief. This wasn't—it couldn't be true. Apes didn't

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talk! But these did. For once more the ape said, "Moani. You come back."

Sheila looked at the great anthropoid, saw the small eyes and close-set ears, the shaggy fur covering the great pectoral muscles, and felt something strange come over her. It was as if she had *known* a scene like this before.

"I have come back."

Litmer let his arm fall from about her shoulders. He swallowed hastily and shook his head in bewilderment. Sheila couldn't have spoken those words. But she had. What was more, she had suddenly stepped forward to meet the creature.

"You are Toti," she said. "I know you. I knew your father and his father and his before him. Aye, I have come back."

The ape whirled at her words and shouted in a voice which echoed and re-echoed in the vastness of the caverned river, "It is true. Moani has returned as she has said. Bow down."

As one the hundred or so apes did as Toti commanded. Then Sheila stepped forward and touched him lightly on his shoulder and said:

"Rise, my children."

The ape called Toti said, "It has been a long time, a long time."

"Aye. I have come to keep my promise," Sheila said.

"To destroy the intruders?"

"No. Only those who hate us."

"And these?"

"Are my friends."

"But some are white, as the enemy."

"From another tribe. They are friends. We must help them."

"What do you want, Moani?"

"Take us to the sacred pool, Toti."

"Moani lives forever, as it is said. Come."

It was as if Sheila had said the "open sesame," for Toti and the rest of the apes immediately started off in a direction away from the river. Not all of them left with Toti. Some waited for Sheila and her friends to follow; then they closed behind them, as a sort of honor guard.

"Sheila!" Litmer demanded. "What's this all about? How did you know that ape's name? How . . . oh hell! I'm as out of place as ice cream at the North Pole."

They waited for her explanation, although Hemet had an idea of what had happened.

Her eyes were as bewildered as theirs when she replied to their requests. "I don't know," she said. "I—I sort of got dizzy. The next thing I knew, well, you heard what I said."

"I think I have the answer," Hemet said. "Strange as it may sound, I think Miss Sheila is a reincarnation of this Goddess they worship, Moani. But after all, this is a strange land to begin with and all the things in it are strange. You were so interested in Miss Sheila's behavior, you didn't even notice that the apes spoke our tongue."

"Say! That's right," Litmer said. "But I don't find that strange. What other tongue would they talk?"

"Ah! *Now* I've forgotten something. That I put you under the orientation machine. And I think that explains Miss Sheila's action. Something happened while she was under the influence of the machine. We've just seen the result."

THEY had to be satisfied with that until a more logical one was offered. In the meantime, the apes, with Toti at their head were going deeper and deeper into the dismal fastness of the underground jungle. For a long time they walked. Then McAllis noticed that the darkness was lessening and the trees were thinning out. He peered closely toward the spot they were ap-

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proaching but could not make it out too well.

Suddenly the lead apes began a chant;

*"Moani has returned*
*She has kept her promise*
*Come kneel before her image*
*Moani has returned."*

Then one by one the apes made a path for the humans.

They were in an immense cave from the top of which huge stalactites dripped their calcified drippings. The air was cool and fresh. McAllis was the last to enter and as soon as he was within the cave, Toti walked to the side of Sheila and took her by the arm.

"Come, mighty Goddess and see how we have kept your memory fresh and unstained."

Sheila did not think it odd that Toti took her arm. In fact she expected it. Somewhere deep in her memory recess-ess was a recollection that was how it had been done long ago. All was silence as she and the huge ape walked forward toward the far end of the cave. But though the apes did not follow their leader, the humans did.

They saw something then, which they could not have seen from the entrance. It was hidden from them by a bend in the wall. When they did catch sight of the large stone image they gave voice to expressions of awe. They could understand, then, how the ape recognized Sheila.

It was her to the smallest degree, even to the buck teeth. The figure was nude, rising tip-toe, with hands upraised in an imploring expression, head thrown back in ecstacy and with features exultant. Toti walked to within ten feet of the statue, then dropped to his knees and bowed his head before it. Sheila stepped up to it and looked long at it. McAllis noticed the expression of brooding wonder in her face as she gazed at it. Then she turned and said to Toti, "Rise and hear me."

When she and the ape had come face to face with the image, the rest of the anthropoids had also fallen to their knees. Now they arose and with the words, shouted as with a single voice, "She speaks."

Sheila said, "Aye. I speak. Hear my words. The Prophecy must be told. Take us to the pool. And when the words are given, then shall I command."

Toti arose and faced the apes.

"Bring the weapons for these men," he said.

Two of the apes disappeared for a few seconds. When they returned they bore bows, arrows and the short swords which Thetis' warriors had worn. These were distributed to Hemet and the others.

"We are ready, O Moani," Toti said.

"Then lead us," Sheila said.

Straight through the cave went the apes. And once more through a region of gloom, of twisted, tortured trees, whose branches were festooned with ill-smelling moss. The undergrowth was rank with the smell of death. It grew high so that the humans felt as if they were walking through the foul paths leading to Hell. The trees grew closer, the light less. Now it was labor to walk between the trunks. Soon they walked single file.

McALLIS was tired. He had not slept for a long time. For the first time hunger gripped him. He wondered if the rest of his life was to be spent without food and sleep. Already his eyes could no longer obey the command of his will.

Litmer, directly behind McAllis, saw the older man sway from side to side and now and then barely evade walking headlong into the trees. He moved up a few feet and took McAllis by the arm.

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"What's the matter? Don't you feel well?" he asked.

"I'm so damned sleepy," McAllis said with a small smile.

"No wonder," Litmer said pityingly. "Hell! The last time . . . But when was that? I can't remember. Stick it out. It can't be long, now."

If it is, McAllis thought, I'll just lie down here and go to sleep.

The lead ape was far in advance. There was no sound of warning. Yet the long file of apes stopped as if there had been shouted words of warning. Toti trotted back to them.

"The she-devil and her men are at the pool," he said in low tones.

"Is there any other path but this?" Sheila asked.

Toti's shoe-button eyes looked blankly at her. He nodded his huge head. "Follow me," he said.

There were no other words. Yet, as though by telepathy, the rest of the apes came back from that region in the front where they had gone. McAllis and the rest could not hear them, so silently did they move, yet they had the inexplicable feeling that, behind them, huge furry bodies fell into line.

They hadn't gone more than a few hundred feet when they came to a halt once more. And this time Toti came back to tell them that they had arrived.

McAllis' hunger and sleepiness fell from him. The strange goal was arrived at. He pressed forward unconsciously. He wanted to see what this strange pool looked like. The ape and the girl were side by side in an opening between the trees. He came and stood beside them and saw what they were looking at.

It was an immense circular place, open on all sides. The trees came down to the very water's edge. A hollow, booming sound filled the air. And born on it were spoken words, yet so low they made no sense. Only now and then an unrelated word was plucked from the air to be heard and wondered at. For it was like a single note given, then on longer repeated.

They became aware of certain things. For one, they saw that the pool in reality was a lake. At the very farthest end from them, a wide silver streak showed where the river flowed into the pool. Bobbing up and down on the water were the boats in which Thetis and her men had come.

AT THAT end, light showed above and below, to break up the picture of general gloom. But at the end where Hemet and his friends were, darkness prevailed. Whispered words came to McAllis, peering intently toward Thetis and her men.

"We will come upon them from behind. Their weapons are stronger than ours."

It was Toti who had spoken. Sheila nodded somberly in agreement. McAllis realized that the slip of a girl had somehow become their leader, for instantly Toti, without waiting for anyone else's opinion, moved off along the border of trees in the direction of the women at the far end of the pool.

As before, the long, single line of apes and humans followed. It was tangled backbreaking work, getting through the undergrowth which lined the pool. Creepers, whose thorned leaves stabbed at the bareness of their legs, hindered and made the going treacherous for the humans. It was one of these growths which gave their presence away to Thetis. For Litmer stepped unwittingly into a bush whose chief characteristic was the vast number of thorns it possessed.

He let out a squeal of pain which, magnified a thousandfold by the water, echoed and re-echoed from the roof of

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the cave.

It was no longer necessary to act with caution. At the same time it made their mission more difficult. They had been too far from Thetis to see what she was doing but it was evident from the way they were gathered about her that some sort of ceremony was going on.

The apes broke into a wild shambling run toward Thetis and her crew. Because they had to follow the configurations of the shoreline, they would lose sight of their goal, now and then, so that at the end, when they came into the open, a few hundred yards from the woman, the place was empty.

They gathered at the place and looked wildly around. It was as if Thetis and the rest had disappeared into the void. Then McAllis noticed that the boats were gone.

"Moani," Toti said. "The prophecy. Make the pool give up its sword."

Sheila nodded her head and stepped to the water's edge. She was small-statured, yet she looked like a goddess as she stood there, her head thrown back a look of ecstatic belief on her face. Her eyes were closed and she swayed back and forth in the grip of some strange fervor.

Slowly, she began:

"O pool of darkness, open to us the light of your eternal wisdom. Bring forth the symbol of your glory. Give to us the might that will bring to us our vanished power. Give to us the—" She didn't complete the prophecy.

A hundred flame-tipped arrows, like miniature comets, fell among them. Many of the apes were struck by the flaming barbs. The rest fled before the shower of death. The others saw the source. Thetis had not fled. She had retired to the boats with her men. When the apes and the rest had come down to the water's edge, she had waited until they were so engrossed in the ceremony that they would be unaware of what was transpiring about them. Then she had returned.

An orange glow began to fill the forest glade. The arrows flames had set the trees afire at the edge of the pool. More, she had evidently instructed her men to shoot beyond the trees at the edge. For as Sheila and the rest retreated, they found their path a blazing inferno.

This time it was Hemet who took command. He looked quickly around, appraising the situation.

"Back to the pool!" he said. "The trees are too close-packed here. We wouldn't stand a chance."

Sheila nodded her aquiesence. Instantly Toti turned and lumbered off in the direction from which they'd come. The apes squatted at the water's edge. It seemed as if the whole vast forest was ablaze. And in the center of the pool, Thetis' small armada rode anchor.

THETIS stood erect in her boat. She watched the apes and humans come to the water's edge and a smile of triumph lighted her features. She had thought them dead. Well, they had somehow escaped. But not for long. She saw the great conflagration behind them. The whole forest was aflame. She had only to wait until the flames died at the edge of the pool before returning to the spot where the prophecy would be told. But first these interlopers must be dealt with. She called a command to Hota, "Fill their bellies full of flaming death. I weary of their interference."

And once more the hail of flame-tipped arrows sped toward the defenseless ones at the water's edge. Somehow, the humans escaped being struck. But the toll among the apes was terrific. More than half of them were struck and died in torment. Yet not a single one made the smallest sound even though

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death gnawed at his vitals.

Hemet, his face aflame with rage, looked wildly about trying to find some road of escape, some means of getting away from the holocaust.

Maor, beside his leader, suddenly moaned, "Water. This heat is unbearable."

And Hemet had the answer.

"Quickly!" he commanded. "All of you. Into the lake."

There were perhaps a dozen who were left to follow his bidding. And even as they ran to the pool and leaped in, their number was shortened by three. Only Toti and two other apes were left of the hundred who had brought them.

Thetis watched them leap into the water and commanded her archers to stop shooting.

"Leave them there; they'll hold until we're ready to pick them up."

Slowly the flames along the shore died. Back from where they come the fire raged undiminished. But the shore only showed the blackened stumps of trees. Soon a large area was clear of flame. Then Thetis commanded her boats to put ashore. All but one, which she ordered to watch over those in the water.

She had changed her armor for a robe of pure white. It enveloped her from head to toe. Her long, slender legs, pale as the palest marble showed through a slit in the robe. She walked to the same spot in which Sheila had stood. Her men formed around her, and as she began the same chant Sheila had uttered, they went to their knees in worshipful admiration.

In the meantime the boat had herded those in the water to the shore. Thetis had told the commander of the boat to let those in the water come to land. There was no place for them to go. Besides, she wanted them to watch her triumph.

Bitterness etched a path into Hemet's heart.

At his feet Maor, McAllis, Litmer and the girl lay panting. The heavy weight of their armor had almost pulled them under at times. Now they were spent and weary. And in their souls was a dead weight that was the price of their defeat. Now they watched, emptily, while Thetis tasted of her triumph.

The last of the words had been spoken. A vast silence filled the smoke-blackened space. Once more the booming sound was heard. It filled every nook and cranny of the pool's confines. It echoed in solemn, mystical nuances in their brains. It was as if all the mysteries of the universe were speaking in all tongues to them. From the pool at Thetis' feet a strange and wondrous thing came to be.

AN AURA of golden light broke through the surface of the water. It spread until its effulgence was seen for twenty yards. Then a silver blade, from which emanated a brighter, stronger light, came up from out of the water. And at last, almost unseen because of the reflection of light, a pair of hands upon which the sword rested.

Litmer's teeth closed on an expression of disgust. Those hands looked like they had known the filth of the age. They were black, gnarled and warped and had talons for fingers, the nails of which were several inches long. It was upon these grotesque things that the silver sword with its halo of golden light was borne.

At the sight of the sword a shout of awe came from the lips of Thetis' men. As for the high priestess, she raised her head, closed her eyes and uttered the words, "Thy will be done. The power is mine."

The hands rose higher until they were

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out of the water to their elbows. Then Thetis stepped forward and took the sword. Instantly, the hands sank beneath the water. And the glow vanished. Only the sword gleamed its untarnished golden light.

"Look, black man!" she shouted in a loud voice. "The prophecy is really fulfilled this time. And I have conquered. For does not the prophecy say that death lies in the sword. And I have it."

Only McAllis heard the whisper which left Sheila's lips, "Aye. Death lies in the sword."

Thetis whirled to Hota.

"Tie them. We take them with us. I want them to be there when I attack Mu Minor."

NEVER in all his life had McAllis imagined anything so beautiful as the city of Mu Major existed. It was like a city of a thousand Taj Mahals. The streets were laid in marble and every home was an edifice of translucent, vari-colored mosaics. It had taken the group a long time to reach the city over which Thetis ruled. How long, they did not know. But they had slept once and eaten several times.

Their entrance had been greeted by what seemed the entire populace. Thousands of people lined the immense quay which led to the palace of Thetis. A roaring shout greeted her. When she showed the sword, they went wild.

"See," she said to Hemet, who, bound hand and foot, had been brought on deck, "how my people greet me. I do not fail when I go on a mission."

He smiled at her words and said:

"Words and shouts have never proved anything. You have not taken my city yet."

She laughed mockingly. Then, raising the sword slightly, she struck him across the mouth with the hilt. A bright thread of crimson rolled down the tightly compressed lips of the man. But his smile had returned with the blow. Her eyes turned savage. Rage made her go pale. Her voice was venom-dipped when she said:

"I shall drag you through the streets of your city for that."

Then she commanded Hota to throw him with the rest. The boat anchored and she stepped upon the quay to be greeted by thousands of cheering people. They didn't even notice the strange spectacle of five humans and three apes which came on deck. Hota waited until the people had borne the high priestess away to her palace before he commanded his men to take the prisoners away.

THEY lay on a bare stone floor. Their bonds had been removed and the shackles taken from their legs. It was a large, square room. Light filtered through the bars of a small window set high in the wall. It was so high that not even by a miracle could any of them reach it.

"How long do you think it will take?" Litmer asked.

Hemet smiled and said, "Who knows? Wars are not entered into haphazardly. Not even to fulfill a prophecy. And the people of my city will not greet her with open arms. She has to use her whole fleet in this operation. What's more, she'll have to cut the city off from its only land approach."

"I'd say that was a man-sized job, from what I've seen of your city." McAllis said. His narrow face was pinched-looking, pale with fatigue. There were new lines around his mouth and eyes that told of the strain he had been under.

"Tell me, Hemet," he continued, "are they going to use those motor boats in the attack?"

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The black got his meaning.

"No. It would be a sorry day if she did. Her fleet is anchored in the bay past the turning of the river. You will see it when the time comes."

"Are they as fast as those little boats?"

"Oh no. They weren't meant for speed. As as matter of fact they use sails for locomotion. But they carry a hundred men each and all the war-making materials, such as fire pots for the walls and catapults and so forth."

"But they don't have the speed." McAlliss wanted to make sure of that point.

"What are you driving at, man?"

"Escape," McAllis said simply.

"Hm. Could be done, if you and the other could get out of here. After all, you're both of the same color as the people of this city. And the armor is the same as they wear. What's more, Thetis is so sure of herself, she didn't throw us into the prison they use. I've been here before. I know this building. It's a sort of warehouse. Furthermore, she didn't even bother putting a guard at the door. If only there was a period of darkness, as above."

McAllis understood what Hemet meant. How much less difficult it all would be, then.

Hemet snapped his fingers, suddenly.

"It might work," he said. "What's there to lose? Here. I'll draw a rough map for you."

Maor, who had been an interested listener to their talk, snorted loudly.

"Bah! You talk foolishness. At the best, only the small one and the tall blond would get away. And, granting that they escape, to whom will they go when they arrive? Answer me that."

Hemet pursed his lips.

"I see your point, Maor. Without one of us to vouch for them and coming from an enemy boat, they would be set upon. And even if that doesn't happen, the only ones they can go to are the elders. No. It is foolishness. The traitor would welcome them with open arms."

"Speaking of traitors," Maor said reflectively, "isn't it strange that Stomat is not here with us. I did not see him either when we got on or off the boat."

"Maor! What are you suggesting? That Stomat is a traitor?"

"Could be," Maor said laconically.

"But we saw him wounded."

"The arrow took a wrong path. I think it was meant for his heart. Were you with Stomat at all times, Hemet? Do you *know* that he didn't manage a message to Thetis? What is more reasonable to think that she would betray him? By killing him, she wouldn't have to pay for his services. Why was he the only one struck? We were all easy targets."

"Then we must escape!" Hemet cried in so loud a voice that Litmer and the girl, lost in their love, even though they were in prison, turned startled faces in his direction. "Only the elders know of the secret entrances to the city. And that she-devil will have gotten the secret from him."

HEMET arose and began to pace back and forth from wall to wall. They watched him apprehensively. Never had they seen him so angry. His lips were pressed so tightly that the cut from the hilt of the sword opened once more. He didn't even notice that it was bleeding.

"We must escape," he repeated.

McAllis wracked his brain for a plan which might succeed. Slowly an idea began to form in his brain.

"If we can force the door . . ." he began slowly, and waited.

Hemet strode to the door and tugged

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at it. He whirled savagely.

"Like granite!" he gritted.

"Sheila!" McAllis turned to the girl.

"Yes."

"The apes. They can force it, can't they?"

She looked at Toti and the other two. They hadn't seemed to be paying any attention. But when she looked at them, they nodded.

McAllis crooked his finger for her to come close and when she did, whispered, "Will they obey any command of yours?"

"Of course."

Then McAllis called them all, apes and humans, to him.

"Here's the only way it can work. As I remember, this building is only a few yards from the quay. Hemet, you say you know this building?"

"Yes. Every inch of it."

"Is there a rear entrance?"

"Of course. It's a warehouse; goods from the vessels are brought in through the rear."

"Good! Now here's what we do. Litmer and myself will go out first. We will see what's what. If there are no guards out front we will all make a break for it. If there are guards out front, then the apes will cause a commotion in the rear. That will bring the guards back there. We'll have our chance then."

Sheila got the import of the alternative. If there were guards in front then the apes would have to be sacrificed. There was a look that was almost human in the eyes of Toti when she turned to look at him.

"Whatever Moani commands," he said gently.

She looked long into the bloodshot, brown eyes, in whose depths lurked a greater warmth and humanness than any one would have imagined. Slowly she drew herself erect. She was truly a goddess when she said:

"What he says is for the best. We must do it."

The apes waddled to the door and placed their hands on the lower sill in which were embedded six bars of steel. Almost effortlessly they began to pull. But the humans saw the great muscles bulge and knot at the furry shoulders. And quite suddenly, there was a squealing sound, and the door swung wide. The first step had been taken.

Litmer started out the door, then came back. Taking Sheila in his arms, he kissed her ardently and whispered, "Darling. Whatever happens, we'll come through. Don't worry." Turning abruptly, he ran after McAllis. Her tremulous smile followed him through the door. They waited with bated breaths for them to return. There was no need for questions when they did. It was plain on McAllis' face. The front gate was guarded.

"How many are there?" Hemet asked.

"Ten. And one can see the boats bobbing in the river from the front door," McAllis said.

"Are there many people out front?"

"No. The street seems deserted."

"Deserted!" Hemet exclaimed. A satisfied smile came to his mouth. "Aha! I think I have the answer. Thetis *is* preparing to leave. Very soon. And she has called the populace to the harbor to assist in loading the ships. What luck!" Suddenly he looked at the apes. "Look!" he said excitedly. "There are the four of us and the three apes. We should be enough for the ten out there. Devil take the back entrance! We'll all go out the front."

The apes began to hop up and down on hearing Hemet's words. Tiny growls rumbled from their chests. It was plain that they wanted nothing more than to come to grips with some of those who had a hand in the killing of their kind.

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Hemet thought of something.

"What arms have they?"

McAllis said, "O n l y those short swords."

TWO OF the guards lounged in the shade of the entrance. Five more were in a close-talking group further down the street. The other two were not to be seen. Sheila had been given the task of opening the door. The apes were to be the first out. Gently, her fingers twisted the knob around. It worked silently. The two guards never knew what happened. Toti's arms swept them together in close embrace and when he let loose their heads wobbled drunkenly on broken necks. Maor and Hamet pulled the swords free from the scabbards.

Quickly the bodies were dragged into the hall. Then while the rest disposed themselves in hiding, Litmer stepped to the front and in an excited voice called to the other guards to come running. It was the weakest part of their plan. For if the remaining guards should have recognized that Litmer was not one of those stationed in the entrance, they might not come close. In that case, Hemet and the rest were prepared to come into the open.

But luck was with them. Either because of Litmer's tone of excitement, or because after calling, he turned and ran back inside—whatever it was, it worked. The five ran quickly up the short flight of steps, and were met by Hemet and Maor with sword thrusts through the throat and by Toti and the other two apes by tearing fangs. It was over in a few seconds. So savage and surprising was the attack that not a single one of the guards had a chance to scream a warning.

The way lay free before them.

They were half-way to the dock when the two guards who had been missing turned the corner of the street leading to the warehouse. They had gone for some food. They took one look at the prisoners in flight and turned, yelling at the tops of their voices.

"The first one," Hemet grated as they reached the short flight of steps leading down to the boats.

It seemed empty as they leaped pell-mell into it, but even as Hemet, the first to leap into the boat, landed, three men arose from the deck. Bare steel gleamed brightly as they converged on him. Then they saw the rest and backed away for a second. It was enough to let Toti and another of the apes reach the deck. Then the boat guards leaped to the attack.

One of them went down from a single slashing blow of Hemet's sword. The other took a cut at Toti and found he was too slow. The ape's body wasn't where the sword's path ran. Instead, as large and clumsy as Toti appeared, he moved with the grace and ease of a boxer. Ducking the blow, he came up with both hands fastened around the guard's middle. There was a single scream of inhuman anguish, the body heaved as Toti tightened his grip—and that was all.

But the third guard was the smartest of the three. Not that his smartness gave him another lease on life. It only lessened the number of those who escaped. For he had stopped short and just as the ape was on him, he shifted his grip on the sword and heaved it full into the ape's throat. His eyes bulged in terror as the ape, with the sword point showing behind him, came on. Then the eyes rolled back as the hairy arms folded themselves around him. Blood poured from the guard's mouth in a bright flood as the ape choked the life from him. They toppled to the deck together, dead.

Maor leaped over the two interwined

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bodies and ran to the bow of the ship and seized the steering wheel. Kicking at the throttle, his face split in a grin as the engine caught.

"Let them catch us now" he chortled in glee as the wheel answered his fingers and the boat swung around in a tight circle and headed back in the direction from which they'd come.

TIME flew by on racing wings. They didn't bother about sleeping or eating although the galley below held a full complement of food. They wanted to get back as swiftly as possible, for they knew that their escape had been noticed and that Thetis had sent pursuers after them. Not only that, but they had to prepare defenses for the coming invasion. Hemet knew that nothing would stop Thetis, now. She had the sword and the prophecy.

Then there was the matter of Stomat's treachery. . . .

A few guards stuck their heads over the walls to look at the strange craft as it swung in for a landing. But when they saw Hemet and Maor emerge from it, the heads disappeared. When they returned, there were more of them. But the truly wonderful thing was the number of people at the dock when they tied up. Exclamations of wonder and delight echoed through the high-walled, narrow streets when the people who had come running at the news of Hemet's arrival, saw the apes. But it was the heart-warming welcome and the apparent joy of these people at the return of their leader that gave Hemet a real hope for the defeat of Thetis.

Once more they were in that austere room of smooth white walls and high, domed ceiling. And once more the council of elders sat in judgment before them.

Hemet told what befell them in simple, straight-forward language. The council listened without interrupting once. And at the end, the leader, the same man who had openly spoken against them, stood up and, speaking for the rest, told Hemet to prepare immediately the city's defenses.

It seemed to McAllis and the others that every man, woman and child in Mu Minor had a hand in the task of making ready Thetis' reception. No one was immune to the virus of work. They labored, if not night and day, then every waking hour and some sleeping ones. And when the first sails of the invading fleet were sighted, the defenses were ready for them.

The element of surprise which Thetis had expected to hold over them was gone. More, since they had a knowledge of treachery, they had prepared for it. The hole in the dike of their defenses was plugged. Thetis had to make the classic river approach.

THERE was no night, no day, to the battle which ensued. McAllis knew only that the arrows, the fire, the boulders hurled by the giant catapults, the scaling ladders, never stopped in their attempts to break down the defense of Hemet's people.

McAllis and Litmer had been assigned a section of the wall which proved to be the most difficult to defend. It jutted out into the river in such a way that it was almost isolated from the rest of the wall. Time after time, they were attacked from three sides simultaneously.

At those times, McAllis had the impression he had stepped back through time to the days of the knights. Immense cauldrons of oil had been set up at various strategic points on the wall. Immense bows shot fifteen-foot steel-tipped arrows, whose tips had been dipped in the burning oil, into the vessels which lay on the placid river below. And

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there were hundreds of these boats.

Some of them had been stationed at the far bank, some two hundred yards from shore. These had towers erected on them which were used by the archers and catapults. Many were the ships that had been struck and set afire by the huge, burning arrows. They lay, hull down, in the water. But always, there were others to take their place.

Thetis had secured a bridgehead on the land side of the city. It proved to be of immense advantage. For now the city's people had begun to know hunger.

As Hemet pointed out, no city could hold out too long if its defenders were starved. And the time had come, McAllis realised, when it was a question of how long? He stood in a protected corner and watched the battle. Somehow it was a detached sort of affair. Men died, some horribly, some almost painlessly, and others incurred terrible wounds. Yet the reality of close combat did not touch them. He looked out and down and saw Thetis' flagship. It had a pennant flying from the top-most mast. A shallow grin creased his lips.

The pennant bore the figure of a sword thrust through a heart.

Maor stood beside McAllis. There was a somber brooding quality to the man's face which the long period of fighting had put there. He was tired, too. A shower of barbed arrows came toward the wall. The two ducked beneath the overhang until the last of the arrows clattered by. Some found marks. The wounded were carried away. The dead were lifted and heaved over the ramparts.

McAllis sighed and said:

"If only there was night and day in this world."

"I understand," Maor said. "But that has not happened in a hundred years."

You mean there actually is a time when darkness comes?"

"Not darkness. But from somewhere a cloud formation arises and covers the sun."

The sun! What sun? McAllis thought, bitterly. That molten ball of hot gasses which neither rose nor set, but always stood at zenith. He looked toward it, shading his eyes as he did so. And Maor saw his lips work in surprise.

"Look!" McAllis almost shouted. "Clouds."

IT WAS true. Dark, oily-looking clouds had appeared, as if by magic, on the horizon of the bowl.

They looked at each other wordlessly for several seconds, then turned as one and ran for the stairway.

Hemet pounded his sword in sheer excitement when he heard the news. "Now we have a chance!" he said, his features alight with hope.

"Those speed boats," McAllis said. "When it gets dark enough, we can attack Thetis' vessel with them."

"Right," Hemet agreed. She must die. With her death the fight will leave them."

Hemet had men assigned to a constant lookout on the tower. The clouds, small in the beginning, assumed mammoth proportions before long. Then came the moment when the lookouts reported that the sun's face was covered. Darkness covered the land.

The small boats were blobs of lighter darkness against the greater of nature's. There was a creak of metal gear and the small clank of swords in scabbards. A hundred men filed down the grassy path which led to the pier. They were like metal ghosts, silently on the prowl for human victims.

The boat moved off, silent as the river on whose bosom it moved. In the bow, sword in hand, stood a dozen men.

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These were the ones whose duty it was to board Thetis' craft. Theirs was the most important and hazardous job. For they had to secure the foothold for the rest.

They moved out into the center of the river. To one side, the towering walls leaned against the blackness of the night. It was a strange, a fearsome night, shot with fire, out of which sparks flew heaven-ward. Here and there a vessel leaked flames and smoke. The shout of the attackers and the dying mingled in horrible cacaphony. But the men in the small flotilla heard them not. They were intent on one thing only—the vessel whose pennant bore a sword thrust through a human heart.

McAllis and Litmer stood side by side in the bow; they had asked to be among those whose duty it was to board the boat. Near them was Toti and the other ape.

"Think we stand a chance?" Litmer asked.

"Our only one," McAllis said with certainty.

"I think you're right," Litmer said. "And I think it's going to work out."

"It's got to," McAllis said, smiling up at the face of the man beside him.

Then a great, gray mass loomed beside them. Their goal.

McAllis moved to the apes.

"Remember," he warned. "They must die noiselessly. Then loose the ladders."

Toti nodded in understanding. McAllis didn't even see them go. The little boat rocked easily in the water. On it, men breathed in s h a l l o w gasps and waited for the smallest sound to tell them that all was well. Quite suddenly there was a clatter of falling timber. Men jumped as if bitten by an insect. It was the boarding ladder. Toti and the other ape had done their work.

Twenty men stood on the deck, their swords no longer sheathed. More were scrambling up the single ladder. Ahead, mid-ships, was heard the sounds of the ship's crew. But where they stood, nothing moved, nothing lived. Four sailors rolled with the movement of the ship. They were dead, each with a broken neck.

There were a hundred men on the deck. And the little boats, banged and scraped against the sides of the larger vessel. And no one cared. For these were men who could not go back. It was conquer or die, with them.

THEN the quiet was broken and the hundred went into action. Hemet ran at their head. At his side were Maor, McAllis and Litmer. Their goal was the poop deck which lay amidship. They hadn't gone more than twenty feet when the first of the defenders met them. In a second the deck was alive with struggling, screaming men. Hemet had sent half his force around the bow to prevent Thetis from leaving. If all went well, they would meet in the stern.

Hemet, his face alight with the joy of battle, slashed and stabbed at those in his way. Men fell like stalks before the reaper, as those behind him fought with a fury born of despair.

McAllis found it strange that he should think it natural for him to have this keen-edged blade in his hand and that he should know how to use it. A burly sailor, stripped to the waist, rose, seemingly from out of the deck itself, to face him. A curved scimitar glinted wickedly in the half light. He danced forward on light moving feet to meet McAllis. Suddenly the blade whirled over his head and came down in a wicked slash which, had McAllis been where the cut ended, would have found himself without a head. But he wasn't. At the last second, he had stopped short. The blade whistled harmlessly by. Then

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he moved forward swiftly. The sailor's head rolled one way, the body another.

But it was Litmer who had reverted to a condition that he had never imagined he had known. His blond hair streamed in the light breeze. He moved ever forward, relentlessly pressing back those who faced him. His sword sang a song of death to those unfortunate enough to get in its way. Even Hemet, who knew of these matters, found time to wonder at the man.

Then they were on the lowest steps leading to the poop deck.

And as suddenly as the clouds had come, they disappeared. Above them they could now see Thetis. She wore armor, which gleamed redly in the new light. It encased her from head to toe. Her ebon-hair knew no helmet and it streamed behind her in a river of darkness. All about her were the grim-faced remnants of her personal body-guard. Hota, the giant, stood beside her. At sight of the enemy he broke into raucous laughter.

"Look, priestess," he shouted. "They have come in person to get their deserts."

Litmer felt a strange joy come to life in his breast at the sight of the woman and man above them. These were the enemy, and they must be destroyed. He leaped the few feet which separated them. As he jumped, Hota ran to meet him.

Then all was still. It was as if these two joined combat as a symbol of who would survive.

Hota was the taller, the bigger man. But Litmer was the quicker, the better reflexed. It was an even match.

FOR A few seconds they circled each other, looking for a weak spot. Hota made the first move. Disdaining cleverness he charged in, his sword darting like a wasp's stinger for a weak point in Litmer's defense, the opening between the joing armor at the throat. Litmer's sword seemed to b a r e l y move, yet Hota's weapon was turned aside. Litmer danced lightly back and forth flicking his sword before the other, trying to draw him into a false move. But the bigger man was content to follow and wait. He had not long. As though Litmer was tired of the game he was playing, he suddenly stepped forward and slashed downward. The other sword came up in a quick parry, but at the very last instant Litmer changed the direction of his sword's thrust. Instead of coming down across Hota's skull, it tore through the armor at the shoulder. But it proved to be only a flesh wound. The parry had turned it aside at the last and laid Litmer open for Hota's counterblow. Disregarding the pain and the blood, Hota continued his stroke from parry. The sword point entered Litmer's side. They were even. Each had drawn blood.

Once more they circled each other.

"Ah. If only I could get you into the circle of my arms," Hota said, tauntingly.

Litmer stopped short at the words. "As you want," he said. And dropped his sword to the deck.

And from Thetis' lips came a scream, "Now. Now, Hota. Kill him."

Hota turned and gave her a wild look of sudden hate. Then he too dropped his sword and came at Litmer.

They came together with a crash. Because of the armor they wore, there was only one spot they could aim for. The throat. But Litmer first wanted to wear the other down. He sent a lightning hook to Hota's chin. The other staggered back, shook his head and ploughed forward, fingers clawing for Litmer's throat. Once more Litmer sent his fist crashing into the other's face. And again. But this time, Hota took the blows and grabbed Litmer by the hair.

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Litmer jerked his head down and Hota's nose spouted crimson. Then the big man's fingers shifted lower and fastened themselves around the neck. Stooping slightly, Hota heaved upward, then twisting his burden, sent Litmer crashing to the deck.

At the last second, Litmer managed an old wrestler's trick. He kicked hard as he struck the wood and his foot caught Hota just above the ankle toppling him down also. Before he could recover, Litmer's fingers were twisted in the flesh of his throat. Litmer started to squeeze, then stopped at the sound which had suddenly welled from the throats of the watchers.

Thetis, seeing her champion was about to lose, went mad. She had been carrying the sword from the pool. Suddenly she raised it high above her head, stepped forward and began to plunge it into the back of the defenseless man below her.

Hemet stood a few feet from her yet he was seemingly bound to the deck. No one was near enough to stop her. The blade was a gleaming streak of light plunging for Litmer's neck. And another flash of light came to meet it. Maor had thrown his sword and it had somehow managed to deflect the other. Litmer looked and felt his chin drop. His fingers relaxed their straining grip. Hota, too, forgot their death struggle. For when the thrown sword struck the other, it had not only deflected it, it had sent it twisting upward. Thetis, overbalanced, had fallen to the deck. The sword's point protruded for a foot through her throat. The prophecy had been fulfilled. The sword had brought death.

"HEMET tells me we can go whenever we are ready," Litmer said.

He and Sheila stood side by side on the wall's battlements. McAllis and Maor had joined in some sort of argument below. The battle had ended with the death of Thetis. Hota had taken over the rule of Mu Major and he and Hemet had worked out a deal. Now the two had left those below in their celebration of victory and had come above to be alone.

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "I know."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about it. Won't you be glad to get back to your father?"

"Look, Ralph. When you and McAllis met me, I was going to Chowrath Sam's for something to eat. Then I was going to go to a friend's. Do you know why?"

He shook his head.

"To live. My father and I had broken up. He told me that I was an ungrateful girl, that I had been taken from an orphanage, and that after all he had done for me, I had no right to say what I did."

"Why? What did you say?"

"What McAllis said about him," was the answer. "That he was a cruel and heartless man, who used men as slaves. I could never go back." She looked up at him. "What about you? Do you care to go back?"

"Me!" Litmer laughed joyously. "I sought adventure—and found you. It doesn't make any difference where I go. So long as you're there."

She looked out over the peaceful scene below, the river winding its way up to the blue haze in the distance, the green of the pastureland beyond the far shore and saw a shepherd tending his flock.

"Then why go anywhere?" she asked lowly.

There was no answer to that, for Litmer had taken her into the shelter of his arms.

THE END

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# Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

## Alessandro Volta

**He was the eighteenth century physicist after whom the "volt" was named. The electric age owes him much**

ALESSANDRO VOLTA, Italian physicist, celebrated as a pioneer of electrical science, after whom the "volt" is named, was born at Como, Italy, on February 18, 1745.

After receiving a good general education, he became deeply interested in the investigation of the phenomena of electricity, which was then just beginning to attract the attention of students throughout the educated world. In 1774 he was appointed to the chair of natural philosophy in the gymnasium at Como, and in 1779 was advanced to a professorship at the University of Pavia. In 1777 and again 1782 he journeyed through Switzerland, France, Germany, Holland and England, and became acquainted with many scientific celebrities.

In 1801 Napoleon called him to Paris, to show his experiments on contact electricity, and a medal was struck in his honor. He was made a senator of the kingdom of Lombardy. In 1815 the emperor of Austria made him director of the philosophical faculty of Padua. In 1819 he retired and settled in his native town, where he died on March 5, 1827. A statue was erected to his memory at Como.

When Galvani, in 1790, announced his explanation or theory of the phenomena of the frogs' legs as an exhibition of a new force, which he called the "vital force," or "animal electricity," Volta disagreed with him, claiming that the current exhibited in the batrachian's legs originated in the two metals involved, and not in the muscles or nerves of the animal. Not possessing at that time the high standing of a man of science that Galvani commanded, not much attention was paid to his theory. But by 1800 he had constructed what was at first called Volta's "crown of cups," and later known as the voltaic pile.

As originally made, the device consisted of disks of two different metals, zinc and copper, arranged in couples, each couple separated from the one above and below it by a disk of cloth moistened with a weak solution of common table salt. Then, when the upper member (copper) of the couple at the top was connected with the lower member (zinc) at the bottom of the pile, by a copper wire, an electrical current was set up which could be felt, or made to ring a bell. When the details of this experiment came to the ears of Sir Humphry Davy, he is said to have remarked that "the voltaic battery was an alarm bell to experimenters in every part of Europe."

It was quickly shown that Volta's explanation of the cause of the current was no more correct than that of Galvani. For, when the metal couples were placed in cups—or cells as now designated—and connected up, and a weak solution of acid in each cell took the place of the cloth moistened with salt, not only was the current much stronger, but chemical action began, which plainly was the cause of the current. Several years elapsed before it was clearly understood just what was taking place, but by 1802 water had been decomposed by the current into its two constituent gases; hydrogen and oxygen, and in 1807 the first electric arc light was produced, in both cases the current coming from a large and powerful voltaic battery. This was the beginning of the science of electro-chemistry, which now plays such an important part in innumerable modern and vital industries.

Volta is also remembered as the inventor of the electrophorus, the condensing electroscope, the electrometer, the electric pistol, and the electric lamp. All these, in the form he gave them, would now be regarded more as toys than as scientific tools, for in his time, and for many years after it, electricity was regarded as a kind of fluid. Nevertheless, so remarkable were the manifestations resulting from his crude experiments that his name has been justly honored in the realm of science, by adopting it—the volt—as the unit of electro-motive force, and he is properly regarded as the father of the science of electro-chemistry.



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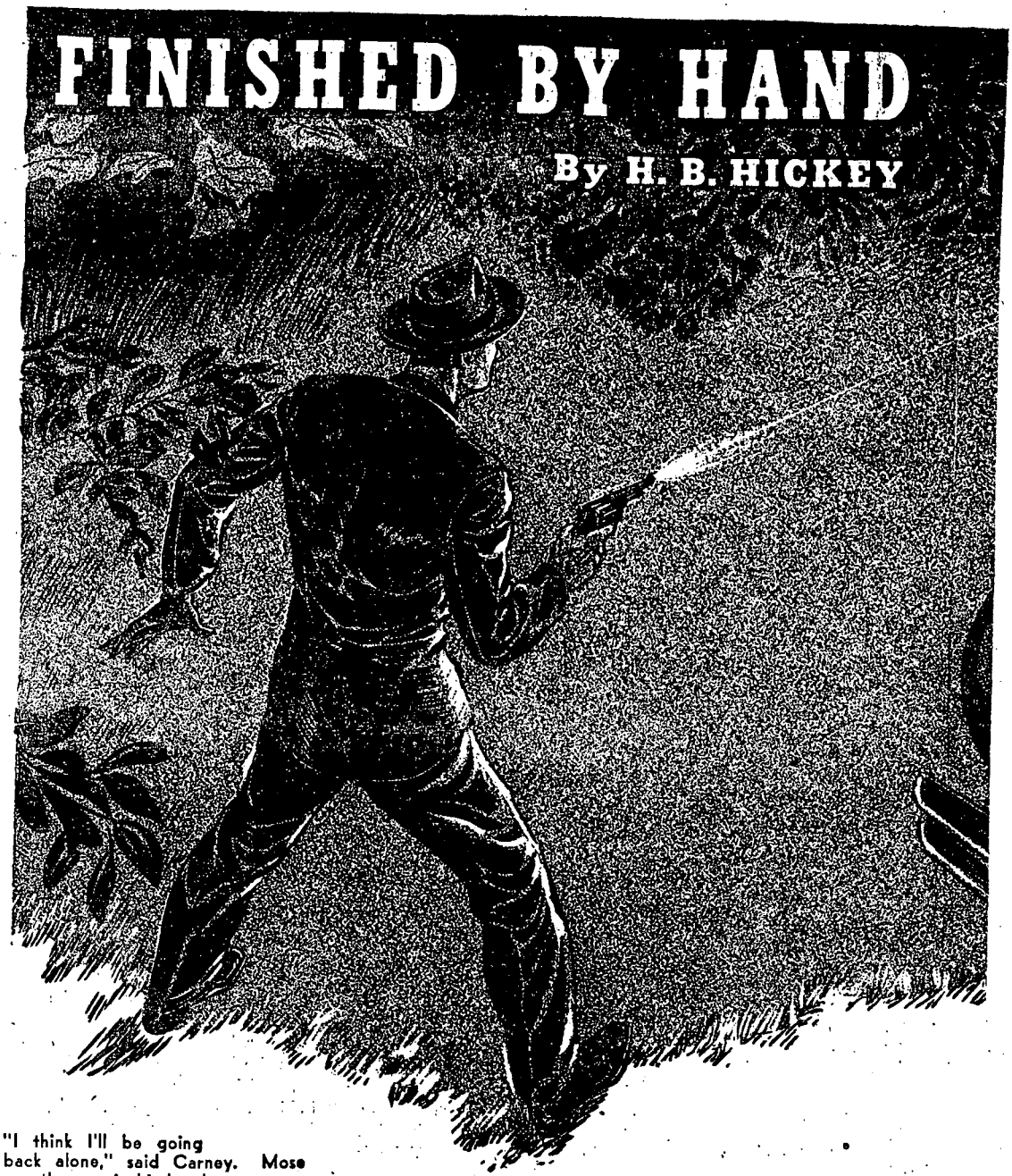
# FINISHED BY HAND

By H. B. HICKEY



"I think I'll be going back alone," said Carney. Mose saw the gun in his hand.

CARNEY handed the three twenty-dollar bills to Big Mose. "One's the real one," he said. "See if you can tell which."

The broad shouldered man took the banknotes to the studio window and studied them carefully. He shrugged.

"Gimme a glass," he told Carney. The lanky con man grinned as he picked up a magnifying glass from the table and threw it to Mose. With its aid the big man examined the bills again.



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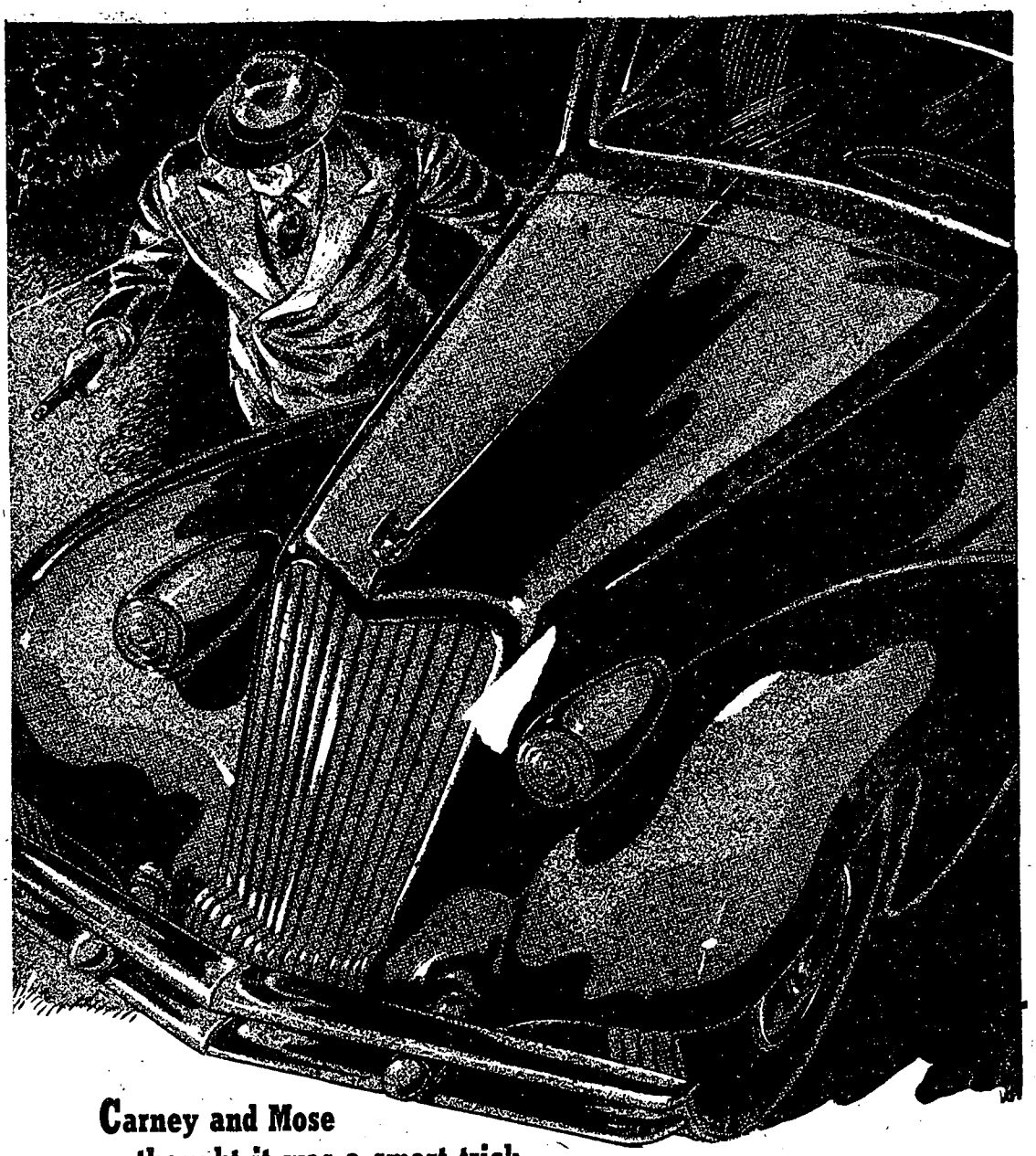

**Carney and Mose thought it was a smart trick to cut off a thief's hands—but they were thieves too!**

"Don't kid me," he sneered at the other. "None of 'em is phony. I seen too many bogus bills to be fooled."

The hollows under Carney's high cheekbones filled slightly as he laughed. He walked over to the thin, longhaired individual who sat before the small printing press and clapped him on the shoulder.

"You're a good man, Guido," he told him. "I been around a long time myself and this is the best engraving I



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ever seen."

Guido pulled his shoulder away. "Listen, Mista Carney. Sure I'm a fine engraver. My father he was a fine engraver. When I was seven years old I could copy anyone's name so you couldn't tell the difference. Then my father he teach me the trade. I'ma no crook like you guys. I do this because my keedsa sick and I need lottsa money to send him away. You give me my share, that's all I want. Save your compliments."

"Okay, paisan. We'll keep it strictly business. When you gonna be finished with the printing?"

"Tomorrow night she'll be finish. Five thousand bills altogether."

"Five thousand!" Mose gasped. "A hundred grand!"

"We're through playin' for small potatoes," Carney informed him. "This is big stuff. You do what I say and you'll stay in the big time."

"As long as a guy plays square with me I'm for him. And if he makes dough for me that goes double," Mose said.

"All right then," Carney said, "Here's how we'll work it."

Mose sat down next to him. Guido remained at the press, intent on his work.

"First," Carney told them, "We duck out of here one at a time the way we've been doing. Tomorrow night we come back the same way. I'll come in at seven; you, Mose, at seven-thirty. Guido'll be here most of the day.

"I'll have the car. We'll split up the bundle and then take the plates and the press down to the river and dump them. We'll each work a different part of the city so's if one gets nabbed the other won't. Another thing: if we spread it all in one place the G's'll get hep."

Mose nodded.

Carney lifted a corner of the drape and peeked down at the street below the studio. It was bare of pedestrians. The tall man turned back to the others. "You sure nobody tailed you here?"

"You think I'm an amateur?" Mose asked him.

"Nah, don't feel hurt! I just don't like to take any chances, that's all."

Carney rubbed his hands together. "Everything's set. Guido counted the green in bundles of one hundred, two G's to the bundle. There's two stacks of twenty-five bundles each, a stack apiece. We pay Guido after we've passed half of them."

He handed Mose a stack of the counterfeit money, then produced a large sack from a brief case he had brought with him.

"We put the press and the plates in this and then we go to the river and dump them," he told them.

"Not so fast!" Mose interrupted. "Just because you said there were twenty-five bundles apiece don't make it so. I only got twenty-four."

Carney laughed it off. "Maybe Guido made a mistake. I must have twenty-six. Let's count them over."

He finished first. "Hey, I got twenty-four, too!"

Mose looked at him. "Mine's still the same."

The two faced Guido. "Well, what happened?"

THE engraver was pale. He tried to smile but it did not get past his mouth. The eyes remained frightened. "I—I don't know," he said. "There wassa feefty before."

"Where's your coat?" Carney snarled.

"She's hanging in the closet there."

Carney opened the closet and brought out a shabby coat with frayed cuffs. He searched the outside pockets but found nothing. Then he reached into the inside pocket. There were two bundles

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in his hand when he withdrew it. He showed them to Mose, and the big man's face reddened in anger.

"So," Carney muttered through his teeth, "You're an honest guy! But not too honest to gyp your pals!"

"What—what you gonna do?" the terrified engraver asked, stepping back against the table.

"What we do to anyone who tries to cheat us, you double-crosser!" Carney murmured. He took a step forward and crashed his fist against Guido's jaw. The little engraver sank to the floor.

"Get a rag and gag him," Carney ordered Mose.

As they stuffed the rag into Guido's mouth the leader grinned to himself. It had worked out as he had planned it. Guido had been too frightened to think fast and remember that he, Carney, had been the last one to handle the money. Now he would never get the opportunity to convince Mose that he had not tried to cheat them.

That was the way Carney had intended it from the beginning. Why split three ways when he could eliminate a partner? Besides, he justified his action, the engraver was the one most likely to squeal if he were ever caught. Carney knew that if Mose found out he had double crossed one partner he would begin to doubt his intentions toward him. This act had resolved his difficulties.

"What'll we do with him now?" Mose asked.

"We'll dump him with the rest of the stuff we want to get rid of," Carney told him. "Tie his feet."

Carney acted as lookout while Mose carried Guido to the car. Then he followed with the sack containing the small press and the plates. They drove slowly, careful not to attract attention to themselves, down Ogden avenue to the city limits. From there it was a short distance down unlit roads to the Forest Preserves, through which the Desplaines River made its way sluggishly.

At last they found the spot they were looking for, a point where the water was deepest.

Mose heaved the sack out into the middle of the stream and went back to the car to get Guido. The engraver's eyes were open and whimpering sounds came through the gag as he realized what was going to happen to him. The big man hit him again and he was quiet.

"Wait a second before you dump him," Carney told Mose. He had planned an authentic touch to the killing which would at the same time make the other think twice before trying to cross him.

He opened the trunk in back of the car and took out a hatchet. Mose watched him come toward them.

"We better tie his hands so he can't swim," he suggested.

"That won't be necessary," Carney told him. "I'm going to put the 'mark of the thief' on him. Hold out his hands."

Big Mose held the engraver's arms together at the elbows.

With two sharp strokes Carney cut off Guido's hands at the wrists!

"He can't swim now," the leader told Mose. "Dump him in." He threw the hands into the river after the body. The hatchet followed.

"We'll count over the dough again as soon as we get back," Carney told his partner. "Tomorrow we start passin' it around."

"HAVE a good day today?" Carney asked Mose as the big man came into his room.

"Yeah. Got rid of twenty." Mose saw a newspaper on the couch. "Anything in the paper about Guido yet?"

"No, guess they haven't picked him

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up yet. Won't make any difference if they do now. After a week in the river he'll be hard to identify."

"Uhuh. It's a cinch there won't be any fingerprints either."

Carney gave him a mirthless laugh. "Don't try to spoil my appetite."

"Talkin' about appetites, how about gettin' something to eat?" Mose asked.

"Sure. We'll go down as soon as I get washed up."

Mose read the paper while Carney washed and changed his suit. He came out wearing a neat blue pin-stripe that he set off with a maroon tie and handkerchief to match.

"Pretty sharp," Mose approved. Carney smiled. He considered himself a "snappy dresser."

Carney lived on the twelfth floor and after they had pushed the button they waited for the self-operated elevator to come up. He held the gate open for Mose when it at last arrived.

As Carney was about to follow Mose into the car he thought of something. "Wait a second," he told the big man. "I forgot to take something with me."

Mose stepped out of the elevator and they started back to the room. Behind them there was a prolonged whirring and then an echoing crash. They whirled around.

"What was that?" Mose asked.

"The elevator," Carney told him. "Looks like something snapped and the car crashed down to the basement."

"Whew! It's a good thing you forgot something in your room. We would have been in it if you hadn't."

They walked back to the elevator shaft. Carney pulled the gate open and looked down. He could hear voices far below. He studied the cables in the shaft. They ended at the twelfth floor.

"Hey!" he called to Big Mose. "Take a look at these cables!"

Mose peered over his shoulder. "Yeah. Looks like they wore through."

"Like fun they did! Can't you see how clean the end is? Someone cut those cables!"

Mose stared at him. "That's impossible. Where'd the guy go after he did it? There's no place to hold on in the shaft. If someone did cut them he's down at the bottom with the car."

"We'll soon find out if he is or isn't," Carney told him. "Guess we're going to have to walk down twelve flights, though."

When they got to the bottom they found the manager of the hotel and several of his staff gathered about the wreckage.

"Anyone in it?" Carney inquired.

The manager patted his brow with a handkerchief. "Thank heaven, no! It is most fortunate that no one was in the car when it crashed. He would certainly have been killed."

It was plain that if anyone had been on the roof of the car he, too, would have been smashed to a pulp. The force of the crash had driven the roof down to the crumpled floor.

Carney's eyes met those of his partner's. There was fear in both as they left the hotel.

THE restaurant they were going to was directly across the street and they waited for a gap in the heavy traffic before crossing. At last there was a break and they started across. A heavy car came at them from the opposite direction and Carney drew back to let it pass.

Big Mose seemed to leap directly into its path! There was a shrill squeal as the driver slammed on his brakes and the tires screeched as he spun the wheel over to slide the car around the big man. The car stopped and the driver looked back.

"Why don't you look where you're

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going?" he yelled back at Mose.

The big man was too shaken at his narrow escape to reply. He waited until he and his partner were safely across. Then he wheeled on Carney.

"You pushed me!" he accused.

Carney stared at him. "Pushed you? I thought you jumped!"

The big man's eyes narrowed. "Listen, Carney. I don't like the smell of things. First that elevator takes a dive and now I almost get killed by a car. You wouldn't be tryin' to get rid of me, would you?"

"Don't be a fool! If I'd cut those elevator cables I wouldn't have called your attention to them, would I?"

Mose shook his head. "I guess not. Forget it."

But Carney could see that his partner had not forgotten about it. All through their meal the big man eyed him speculatively. To himself he began to wonder whether it might not be a good idea to get rid of Mose. Then all the money would be his!

"Want to take in a show?" Mose asked him as they paid their check.

"No, I've got a headache," Carney told him. "How about taking a drive along the lake?"

"O.K. with me. A little fresh air wouldn't hurt me any, either."

They got the car from the garage and headed north along the lake shore. After a while the flow of cars on the drive thinned out and soon they were in the north suburbs of the city. The houses became farther and farther apart and they had the road to themselves. At last Carney pulled the car into a side road.

"Let's stop for a smoke before we go back," he suggested.

The two men got out of the car and Carney reached into his pocket, as though for a cigarette. His hand came out empty.

"I'll get a fresh pack from the glove compartment," he told Big Mose as he walked back to the car. His hands were hidden from Mose as he slid the gun out of the compartment and dropped it into his pocket. When he turned around he was tearing the corner off a package of cigarettes . . .

THE canoe drifted leisurely down the river and the young man and his girl talked about various things, like the way the stars were so bright in the sky above, and how large the moon appeared.

"It's fun to go canoing at night," he murmured. "Sort of—you know—romantic—sort of."

The girl smiled understandingly. She listened for a moment to the breeze as it sighed through the trees along the banks. "It is nice," she said.

The young man was encouraged and started to say something more, but had to turn his attention away to slide the canoe around a sand bar that had suddenly appeared in the moonlight.

"Wait!" the girl cried. "There's something on that bar."

"Just shadows," he assured her.

"No," she insisted. "I'm sure I saw something there."

To satisfy her he swung the canoe around and paddled back to the bar. He leaned forward to get a better look. His eyes popped in horror at what he saw!

"It's a man! And look! His feet are tied!"

The girl whimpered. "His arms! Look at his arms!"

He looked. The arms ended in stumps! The hands were gone.

The young man paddled away rapidly. The smooth stroke he had practiced for months was forgotten as terror lent strength to his arms. At last he had to slow down. He felt ashamed for run-

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ning away. After all, the man had been dead! He swung the canoe about.

"You're not going back?" the girl asked.

"There's a boathouse a half mile beyond the sand bar. We can call the police from there."

The girl averted her eyes as they passed the bar but he forced himself to look and make certain the body was still there. He could see the shapeless form high on the sand where the current had swept it. He paddled furiously . . .

"READY to go back?" Mose asked Carney. The other nodded and Mose started for the car.

"Wait a second," Carney told him.

Big Mose stopped and turned to face him. "What's the matter now?" he wanted to know.

"I think I'll be going back alone," Carney said. Mose saw the glint of moonlight on the polished barrel of the gun.

"You rat!" he cursed. "So you did push me in front of that car!"

"No, I didn't. But I'm glad you thought I did. That's what gave me this idea. Why should I split a hundred grand with a big lunkhead like you?"

Mose lunged at him but he was too late. The pistol in Carney's hand barked and the big man faltered and sank to one knee. He tried to get up. Carney aimed carefully and pulled the trigger again. A small hole appeared in Mose's forehead. He toppled.

Carney backed the car onto the main road and headed back for the city. He drove swiftly. The speedometer rose to forty, fifty and then sixty miles an hour.

He plotted his alibi in case he was ever questioned about his activities of the evening. If he stuck to the story that he had dropped Mose off in the city before driving out he would be safe. He was sure he had left no clues. He could dispose of the pistol in the lake.

Up ahead Carney saw two red flares at the side of the road. An oil truck had broken down and the driver had set out the flares to warn oncoming motorists. Carney took his foot off the gas pedal and prepared to swing around the truck.

But the car did not slacken speed. He looked down to see that the hand throttle was pulled out all the way!

Frantically he fought the wheel and found that some force was holding it against him in a path that led straight for the truck. The brakes!

He pumped the brake pedal madly and felt it loose under his foot. It was disconnected!

Carney tried the door in an effort to jump from the car and found it locked against him. He was still trying to get it open when the car rammed the oil truck.

The red flame that followed the impact engulfed both car and truck. In a few minutes they were fused together in an inseparable tangle . . .

"HOW far did you say that sand bar was?" the policeman asked the young fellow. The putt-putt of the outboard motor smothered his question and he asked it again. The girl had been left at the boathouse.

"About a half-mile downstream," the young man told him. "We ought to be there in a few minutes."

They waited tensely. At last they saw it, the body forming a dark blotch on the sand that glittered in the moonlight. The boat's bottom scraped on the sand and the motor died.

The policeman was the first one out. He leaned over the body and studied it. Finally he straightened and faced the young man.

"Murdered, all right. His feet are

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tied like you said." The officer paused and looked back at the man on the sand, then turned again to the young fellow.

"Are you sure this is the man you saw before?"

"Why—yes." He peered down at the body. "Yes, I'm positive that it's the same one. Why?"

"Better take a good look at him. You'll see why!" He stepped aside so the other could have an unobstructed view.

The young man's gaze traveled from the body's feet upward. He recognized the heavy rope that bound them. The clothing was the same and he recalled the hair, long and matted. But the arms!

Instead of ending in two rotting stumps, there were hands on them; hands that were crisped and blackened cinders as though they had been burned in an intensely hot flame.

THE END

## STRANGE BELIEFS ABOUT THE CAT

SIR WALTER SCOTT once said that cats are "a mysterious kind of folk." That other people supported his view is well substantiated in history. The Egyptians believed that the cat protected them from threatening supernatural forces. The Japanese felt the same way about the animal. In ancient times many Orientals believed that the cat had a language of its own and the power to perceive objects and beings invisible to man; they believed that it possessed the knowledge of the future.

There are some physical characteristics of the cat which can account for the origin of these ideas. Unlike other animals, the cat has the habit of looking a person steadily in the eye. His fixed gaze, an almost human stare, gave credence to the theory that the cat could think and that he had a superior mentality. There is no doubt in the minds of investigating scientists that in at least two ways the cat is superior. Their tests prove that the cat has much keener powers of hearing and sight than his master.

Some cats are positively known to be able to prophecy changes in the weather. But there is a physical reason behind this particular talent. A cat with a most remarkable meteoric sense was found in Baltimore, Maryland. Napoleon, as he was called, would always assume a certain position when rain was near. Resting his body prone on the floor, front paws extended, his head would touch the floor between them. After a drought of about forty days in 1930, the animal was observed in this position. The local paper, quoting official reports, announced, "Continued dry." Napoleon's owner telephoned the paper and stated that she was sure it was going to rain because her cat was predicting. Her call brought a great deal of laughter to that newspaper office, but they did not laugh for long. Within twenty-four hours, rain fell. Thereafter, the paper published Napoleon's predictions alongside the official reports, and Napoleon was never known to err.

The explanation for Napoleon's seemingly uncanny talent lies in physical reality rather than his own peculiar mental faculties. His position was like that of a cat which appeared to be suffering from headache. The change in atmospheric pressure which occurs before the coming of rain actually caused his head to ache. That remarkable cat lived to be nineteen years old; his tombstone in the Aspin Hill Cemetery for Pet Animals in Rockville, Maryland, bears his picture with the inscription, "Napoleon, the Weather Prophet; 1917-1936."

For decades the cat was associated in man's mind with evil and witchcraft. The ignorant held witches and cats in terror; the fate accorded the one was meted out to the other. One of the favorite tricks of a witness in a witchcraft trial was to swear that he had seen the devil himself in the form of a cat, and the judges themselves were too credulous and superstitious to inquire how the witness knew that the cat was the devil. Witch and cat executions were not uncommon occurrences.

In ancient Egypt the cat held its most exalted position. When twenty mighty cities lined the banks of the Nile and the art, learning, wealth, and power of the world were centered in Egypt, her entire population of 8,000,000 souls worshipped the cat. As yet the exact reason for this animal worship is not known but social, economic, astronomical, and other interesting theories have been advanced.

An astronomical theory offered by George St. Clair is that the cat was an intercalary month added in the one hundred and twentieth year to rectify the calendar, the Egyptians having had three hundred and sixty-five days in the year and no leap year, and the odd six hours of the year making just a month in the one hundred and twentieth year. This odd idea finds support in the fact that the sacred bull, Apis, the only other regarded with veneration equal that accorded the

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cat, was an astronomical symbol and it was not permitted to live for more than twenty-five years, whereas the Egyptians never killed a cat.

It is not difficult to imagine that the small feline might have represented the moon because of its nocturnal habits, the dilation and contraction of its pupils, and the glistening of its eyes in semi-darkness. The Egyptians are said to have called the cat's glowing orbs mirrors of the sun's rays which overcame the darkness of night as does the moon. Some who contend that the cat was a sacred astronomical symbol offer in evidence the writings found in the "Book of the Dead" which explain that the male cat was the chief god, Ra himself, who was also the sun and took the form of a cat at will.

In very early times the cat became a totem venerated all along the Nile. A prehistoric cat clan, dating as far back as 4,000 to 10,000 B.C., had found Bubastis, the City of Pasht, an important center of cat worship. Pasht was the name given to the cat goddess in whose honor pilgrims came to worship annually. It is estimated that 700,000 people journeyed to the City of Pasht in a single season. Cat amulets were worn, also rings, necklaces of ivory, cat beads and other ornaments, some with the figure of a cat with kittens finely wrought in gems that differ with the period—calcite, lapis lazuli, red carnelian, amethyst and others; and vows and offerings were made to large figures of cats fashioned of bronze and wood, the hair of the body inlaid with gold.

The Egyptians practiced embalming because of their belief in immortality. Along with the great among men, they embalmed the loved and sacred animals. Whether the owner was rich or poor, the body of his cat was carefully embalmed and wrapped in linen and plaited ribbons. The rich man's cat sometimes was given a painted or gilt face, and its ears were pricked up. Majestic felines, such as those of the temples and palaces, were elegantly preserved in bronze caskets with bronze statues of themselves on top. Some rested in cat-shaped boxes.

On the death of a cat the members of the household which it had honored with its presence cut off their eyebrows as a token of affliction. The little body was wrapped in cloth and carried to the embalmer's followed by a procession of solemn men and women. Archeologists unearthed several hundred thousand mummies from the cemetery at Bubastis.

As cat worship faded out of existence in Egypt, in a modified form it was taken up in other parts of the world. In India a heavy fine was imposed on anyone who harmed the animal. In China sacrificial rites, accompanied by theatrical ceremonies, were performed in honor of the cat god. These rites took place from the year 2205 to 225 B.C. A cat was emblazoned on the shields and flags of Roman Soldiers in 100 B.C. In Norse legend there is a cat goddess called Freya, after which the day Friday has been named.

Many European business houses selected the figure of a cat as a trademark to advertise themselves as careful and efficient, and the image of this animal has been used in heraldry to signify independence and freedom from all restraint. Statues of Liberty with a cat at her feet are in England and Rome.

Even in our day those sensitive masters of the written word, our writers of modern mystery fiction, have somehow sensed the feelings of the ancients, and in their works the cat has become the animal of menace and horror. Tabby is not to them the irksome noisemaker to be "shooed away" and cursed on a sleepless night. To them, rather, she is the legitimate heir to a regal history, a Queen with a royal past!—*Carter T. Wainwright.*

## ★ SCIENCE MARCHES ON ★

IT WAS not unexpected when motion picture producers began to recreate on the screen the lives of famous scientists. If anything, it was only surprising that they had taken so long to see the great drama which is so evident in the lives and works of those great adventurers who probed the nature of man and the universe. Pasteur, Bell, Ehrlich, the Curies,—all these figures represent episodes in the story of mankind that compare favorably with the works of the great dramatists.

Why is this so? Primarily because in the investigations and experiments which are carried on in the laboratories throughout the world, even the investigators are unaware what effect a minute discovery may have on the development of a certain theory or idea. Even the smallest piece of evidence may prove to be the final link in completing a discovery of tremendous importance to mankind.

Strangely enough, in this world of science, the breaking down of old ideas based on false assumptions is as important a process as the creation of new theories and ideas. Destruction, in this sense, is an important step in the direction of truth.

There is no more important case nor dramatic one that demonstrates this relationship than that which occurred in Cleveland at the close of the 19th century. The two professors,—Dr. Albert A. Michelson, physics instructor at the Case School of Applied Science and Dr. Edward W. Morley who taught chemistry at Western Reserve University, were the experimentors. Because of their common professional interests these two men were fast friends and were to be seen often in deep consultation with each other. Their companionship was fortunate for the field of science for it produced great results.

Many scientists in those days were concerned with measuring the absolute speed of the earth

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and the stars. The body of reference upon which they based their measurements was the stationary sea of "ether" in which they assumed the earth moved. After much experimentation Morley concluded that the earth traveled at the rate of approximately twenty miles a second.

Michelson and Morley set out to verify the accuracy of this conclusion. They set up an ingenious experiment whereby light beams were made to race against each other by means of a special arrangement of mirrors. If the earth were standing still in the ether, the time required for a light beam to make a double journey of a given length would always be the same, regardless of direction. But the earth is not standing still. It moves on an axis in an easterly direction. A light beam, therefore, which makes a double journey, first from east to west, and then from west to east back to its starting point, should take slightly more time than the light ray which simply made the journey of equal length in the north-south and south-north directions. Because of the motion of the earth, the first ray of light must in reality cover a longer distance before getting back to its starting point than the second ray, which must overcome no such handicap.

Imagine yourself in a rowboat on a river boasting of a strong down-stream current. A friend of yours is in a second boat. Let us assume that you are equally good oarsmen and can travel through the water at an equal speed. You hold a race, your friend rowing 100 yards up-stream and then back to the starting point while you go 100 yards across the current and back. Your friend will have difficulty in rowing up-stream but a comparatively easy time riding back with the current, but the gain of time in rowing down with the current is not sufficient to make good the time previously lost in rowing upstream against the river drift. You should easily win the race. The difference in the time of your return and that of your friend should disclose the speed of the current.

In the same way Michelson and Morley anticipated that they should observe by means of their experiment the speed of the earth's motion through the ether. To their complete surprise, they discovered that the rays of light returned at exactly the same time. The experiment was repeated several times and in each case the result was the same. The scientific world was astonished!

To understand the effect of such a conclusion to the experiment, we must appreciate its implications. These results served to demonstrate that the earth stood still. Had it been in the early medieval days, it would have been interpreted as further proof that the Universe revolved around its natural stationary center, the earth. As it was, men simply wondered and waited for an explanation.

It came in a startling, revolutionary form. A serious-faced young man in Germany stepped forward and amazed the world. He stated that there was no such thing as ether, as science had understood it. He went on to say that the deep-rooted views of physics which gave birth to the ether idea had to be thrown overboard, and that a new conception of the universe must be accepted. Albert Einstein, for it was he who spoke, introduced as part of his revolutionary scheme the conception of time as a dimension of the universe just as important as the familiar three dimensions of space, length, breadth, and thickness.

The Michelson-Morley test, he said, failed to find an ether drift simply because there is no ether. All the properties that physicists had been attributing to the ether were properties of space, not the space of Euclidian geometry, but a geometry in which time was a fourth dimension, so that we have to speak of a space-time continuum.

This was just the beginning. From there Einstein went on to set forth his theory of relativity which even few scientists can understand in all of its ramifications. In its simplest form, the theory explains that absolute motions, with the simple exception of the velocity of light, are impossible to detect. The observed motions of the universe are all of a relative nature and the Michelson-Morley experiment, therefore, is a decisive demonstration that any attempt to detect absolute motion must be frustrated by the very nature of the inter-relationship of matter and space. It is impossible to detect any absolute motion in the universe; all motion is relative to the observer.

You are standing on a railroad embankment. A train shoots by. You say to yourself: "That engineer must be in a great hurry. He is making at least sixty miles an hour." But let us suppose that instead of standing on the embankment you are riding in a second train, running along at the same rate of speed as the first train and in the same direction on parallel tracks. The two trains running alongside each other at sixty miles an hour would be making that speed relative to the ground they are moving on, but would be stationary relative to each other. Similarly, two airplanes, flying one above the other at 150 miles per hour high above the clouds, without means of using the ground below as a stationary standard of reference, would be standing still relatively to each other.

Since the publication of the general concept of relativity in 1915, Einstein has been hard at work on new exploration. He has been busy trying to bring about a wedding of all physical phenomena under one mathematical scheme. Other scientists throughout the world having taken his lead are now at work along similar lines. Independently of each other, they are attacking the problem with all the knowledge and intelligence which they possess. Yet it may well be that their interdependence will be seen again by a seemingly unimportant discovery made by one of them which will enable another to complete the answer.—*Pete Bogg.*

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# READER'S PAGE

## CATCHING UP ON HER READING!

Sirs:

I have been reading the back issues of *Fantastic Adventures* and wanted to catch up to the more recent ones before writing my opinion of them. But as I have about four years to go yet I decided to write and tell you who my favorite authors are. A few of the stories I enjoyed the most were: F. A. Kummer's "Intrigue in Lemuria," Robert Moore Williams' "Jongor of Lost Land," Don Wilcox's "Whispering Gorilla" and "The Robot Peril." Of course any story of Edgar Rice Burroughs comes first with me as he is my favorite author, and I have most of his books, and stories.

Bond's "Launcelot Biggs" and Norman's "Oscar" are the best of the humorous stories. I can't even get interested in Robert Bloch's "Lefty Feep" stories although I read them along with every other yarn in your mag.

I really enjoy stories that deal with mankind after the fall of civilization such as "Thunor Flees the Devils."

I have written to your magazine before, but have never had a letter printed in the "Reader's Page" which I enjoy very much. I would like to see this one printed so I could feel like an old fan, which I really am.

I imagine you get quite a few headaches from the demands your fans make on you, although I realize you encourage criticism. One popular topic of criticism I disagree with is the demand for less fantasy, and more science fiction. I say leave most of the truly scientific stories to *Amazing Stories* and print the fantasy stories in *Fantastic Adventures,* for isn't that what the name implies?

In closing I would like to add that I have quite a few back issues I wish to dispose of. Knowing they are hard to find, as I have, tried to get hold of some of them myself, I hope some of you fans will get in touch with me.

BETTY SMITH,
117 E. 53rd St.,
Long Beach, Calif.

*Hope you've caught up with us now. We had a lot of good stories in those issues of the last four years, and a lot more coming up.*—ED.

## F. A. DIRECTS TRAFFIC!

Sirs:

Regarding your article by Lynn Standish in the December issue of *Fantastic Adventures* would like to call your attention to one item: that regarding graduated traffic light changing system. Mr. Standish states that it may be some time before that particular type is put in general use in this country. It might interest you to know that in my home town, Reading, Pa., we had such a system in use as far back as 1925 or approximately thereabout. Have not been back there for about six or seven years but at last visit they were still using that system. So you see perhaps the European method is not so new. Incidentally it was a very good system for the benefit of pedestrian and motorist alike.

Read your magazine regularly as humanly possible, and, like a lot of things, it isn't perfect, but it provides an outlet for the imgaination and at times, emotions. Thanx for a swell magazine.

JOSEPH MIRASKI,
1703 Unity St.,
Philadelphia 24, Pa.

*Glad to note you read our little fact articles, even when they are on something so fantastic as a new system of traffic regulations!*—ED.

## WHERE'S OUR FIRE AND ZEST?

Sirs:

What has happened to Fantasy Fiction? Just a few years ago there were disputes and corrections in every issue of STF mags. Now, the readers seem to have grown complacent. What has become of the fire and zest of a few years ago?

The writers' output has become hackneyed, because the readers have ceased being demanding. Actual science seems to be outstripping science fiction. Not long ago, in the daily papers, there appeared an article by a leading engineer that after the war there would be rocket planes travelling one hundred thousand miles per hour, at one hundred miles elevation above the earth. That was fantastic, because twenty-five thousand miles per hour is escape velocity, and a plane travelling at four times that velocity could not, possibly, hold to a circle as tight as the circumference of the earth. So much for that.

Plastics, and unlimited speeds have the limelight now. Fantasy has played its part in those endeavors. It is high time that fantasy turns its attention to the most important thing in life: Life Itself!

Where are all the Jules Vernes? They seem to have missed the boat. Nothing is impossible to



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STF writers except immortality. They deal with it with gloves on. When they do write about it, they seem to have no ideas. They mention a serum, or tell of transplanting wornout organs: thus prolonging life. Kindergarten stuff!

Fifteen years ago, Dr. Alexis Carrel gave to the world a foresight of immortality. He proved that our body cells were immortal. He said, "Give the body cells sufficient nourishment, and shield them from poison, and so far as we now know, they would live forever." He said, "The body cells would live forever, if not poisoned." Take away the poison, and what would we have, if not immortality?

We may take a pinch of salt to help digest Einstein's theory, but not so with Dr. Carrel's experiment and statements. They do not need seasoning. They were actual experiments, carried out to a logical conclusion. Dr. Carrel's statements carry the proof that the writer of Genesis was absolutely right when he said that man was created immortal. He was and is immortal because he was given cells that are capable of living forever if not poisoned. Man is immortal right now. He has never died a natural death. Every man, woman or child that has died—was killed, by poison! So many of their body cells were killed, that life was no longer possible.

Dr. Carrel didn't name the poison. In fact, he didn't know what the poison was. He knew only that he was shielding the cells from some deadly poison. He didn't start his experiment with the theory that the cells were immortal. Instead he started with the idea of finding out how long the cells would naturally live if they were not poisoned. He was as much surprised as anyone to find that they would not die if protected from poison.

Let's find that poison!

Everyone is entitled to his opinion. I have mine. I think it is carbon monoxide in the colon.

I corresponded with the leading health specialist —in my opinion—in the world along these lines and his only objection was: "There would have to be laboratory tests to show how much carbon-monoxide was produced in the colon and how much was absorbed into the bloodstream." He wouldn't say that it wasn't formed in the colon or that it wasn't absorbed into the bloodstream. I wonder if I can get an argument out of *Fantastic* readers?

HOBART M. GIBSON,
10½ S. Fountain Ave.,
Springfield, Ohio.

*How about recent discoveries of radioactive carbon? Maybe you have something here.*—ED.

## ROSES FOR BLADE.

Sirs:

Would like to comment on the last two issues of *Fantastic Adventures*. The story, of course, in the July issue was Diamond of Doom. Blade really outdid himself on it. A criticism on the story is your caption under the title in the table of contents, "The diamond had a mysterious significance and its power led into the forgotten past of Mexico." What diamond? Couldn't find any.

A shrewd story of the October issue was Pelkie's. The guy really knows how to write. Looking forward to his other stories he mentioned.

I have Vol. 1, No. 1 (no front or back cover) and Vol. 1, No. 3 (both covers) of *Fantastic Adventures* to sell to the highest bidder.

H. H. BEHRENS,
1527 Lunt Ave.,
Chicago 26, Ill.

*Maybe we meant the diamond on the cover. Did you find that? Arnold Kohn, who painted that cover, had the most pained expression on his face we've ever seen on any artist when he read your letter. HE thought he could paint a recognizable diamond! Thanks for giving us the chance to have a little fun with him!*—ED.

## READS ONE—GETS MORE!

Sirs:

I read the Oct. 1944 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*, then went out and got the May and Oct. 1941 issues, and read them. Explanation—second hand shop.

The new issue was much better than the two old ones.

Please have more stories about the planets. The best story in the Oct. issue was "Martian Adventure," mainly because it was about the planets. But all the stories were exceedingly good. "Cats of Cadenza" was humorous but I don't see why it took eighty pages. "Fair Exchange" nearly got first place. It's a close second. I didn't quite get "Bat Out of Hell," but I had a good time trying.

The cover was good. Different from the usual hero, girl, goon covers. By the way, does McCauley still draw covers?

This brings us back to the Oct. issue of three years ago. Why did you cut out the "Introducing The Author" page? And how about having another poll of favorite science-fiction writers, with all the sf mags getting together?

I liked that article on Saturn. Also the back cover.

MILLARD GRIMES,
2307 10th St.,
Columbus, Ga.

*A lot of our readers are shopping around for back issues, and they are hard to get. Especially do returned soldiers look for them. If any readers have them, we will announce that fact in "Correspondence Corner" to be resumed next issue. Yes, McCauley still paints covers. He has one on our current Mammoth Mystery. We didn't cut out "Introducing The Author." It's just that sometimes we don't have a new author in an issue to "introduce." Who are your favorite authors?*—ED.



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# STORIES of the STARS

## By ALEXANDER BLADE

## *Mizar In Ursa Major*

**Such a civilization as this might possibly exist on a world circling around this giant triple sun**

**SEE BACK COVER**

THE back cover this month shows artist Frank R. Paul's concept of a group of floating cities located on a planet which is assumed to circle the star, Mizar. This star is in the constellation known as Ursa Major, or more popularly, The Great Bear or Big Dipper.

Mizar (also known as Zeta) is in the bend of the handle of the Big Dipper and is easily recognized by the little star, Alcor, near it. Mizar itself is easily seen in a small telescope as a double star, but astronomers have discovered that in reality it is a triple star. It cannot be discerned as such in even the largest telescopes, but the triple nature of the system is determined by means of the lines in the spectroscope chart of the stars.

Mizar is determined to be some 77 light years from our own system, based on the known speed of light as determined in our atmosphere. Since there is reason to doubt that light travels at the same speed in atmosphere as in ether, this figure cannot be claimed with any accuracy. Just as sound travels approximately twice as fast in water as in air, so light may travel twice as fast in atmosphere as it does in ether. Scientists will tell you that the speed of light between two planets (such as between Jupiter and his moons) indicate that the speed is the same in ether as in atmosphere. What they do not definitely prove is that there is no atmosphere enclosing both bodies in a common sea of atmosphere. Even here on Earth there is a difference of opinion as to the extent of our atmosphere, ranging from 450 miles in depth to 180,000 miles (the latter figure including an envelope of such tenuosity as to be almost a vacuum).

Mizar is rated as being 54 times as bright as our own sun, but this figure also is based on an estimated distance of 77 light years and may be in error. Astronomical figures should not be taken too definitely until the science of astronomy has been supported by actual investigation of the conditions in space.

According to ancient legends, Ursa Major is Callisto, the daughter of Lycaon, king of Arcadia. The jealousy of Juno changed her into a bear, and afterward Jupiter placed her among the constellations with Arcas, her son, who became Ursa Minor. One of the ancient authors explains the extreme length of the bear's tail by saying they were stretched by Jupiter as he lifted them by the tail into the sky.

Artist Paul has pictured the planet circling Mizar as a huge world with a dense jungle growth on its surface. Since the spectrum of Mizar shows a great amount of hellium, he assumes that helium would be plentiful on this world. This is a reasonable presumption, and thus his picturing of the cities of this planet as floating in the air high above the uncomfortable and dangerous jungle growth is a logical one.

Obviously the science of engineering has been highly developed by these people. Their "skyscrapers" are huge structures anchored by cables and placed in a huge circle in a valley through which wends a large river comparable to the Amazon. On the ground he has provided huge power houses, utilizing the energy of the river and storing it for use in the floating city.

Transportation between buildings and between cities is accomplished by means of fast jet-propelled ships which utilize the flat tops of the buildings for landing fields.

Each of the floating buildings is approximately one quarter of a mile in diameter, and the living quarters and power centers are located at the center, or hub of the city. The circular tops are the helium chambers which support the city in the air.

At this height, a comfortable and constant temperature is attained where the inhabitants can stroll around an open ramp for exercise and where they can bask in the filtered rays of the three suns coming through the protective semi-transparent glass-like roof of the city which shields them from harmful radiations.

The inhabitants of this world are giant in stature, being approximately eighteen feet in height. This is a giant planet and its environs would dwarf Earth people. Due to the helium content of the atmosphere, disease is a thing unknown, the inert nature of the gas arresting the action of any germ life and providing a continual purifying agent in the blood.

This planet has no night to speak of, revolving as it does in an intricate orbit around its three suns, which in turn revolve around each other. It is an utterly fantastic world.



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# There are two funny things about Wilmer

**The first** is Wilmer's getup.

**The second** is that he doesn't care if he *does* look like a castoff scarecrow.

Because Wilmer's a lot smarter than he looks. While he's making more than he's ever made before, the dough he'd spend for a fancy wardrobe goes right smack into War Bonds . . . and for this Uncle Sam is mighty proud of him.

Naturally, you don't have to look like Wilmer . . . or tramp around in rags . . . to make your country proud of you, and your own future a whole lot more secure.

**All you have to do** is keep getting those War Bonds—and then forgetting them till they come due. Not bad—that four dollars for every three, and the safest investment in the world!

Why not get an *extra* War Bond today?

BUY ALL THE BONDS YOU CAN...
KEEP ALL THE BONDS YOU BUY

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

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# STORIES OF THE STARS—MIZAR

Mizar is a star in the constellation known as Ursa Major. It is a giant world similar to our solar system's planet, Neptune. Space must be filled by planet civilizations. Artist Paul has pictured one here. For details see page 178.

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